"Slavery, Secession, and Sin: Religion and Dissent in the Upcountry South, 1820-1865"

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SLAVERY, SECESSION, AND SIN:
RELIGION & DISSENT IN THE UPCOUNTRY SOUTH, 1820-1865

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
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by

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of scholarship illuminating divisions within Southern society during the nineteenth century, religious historians still imply that white Southerners collectively supported slavery, secession, and the Confederate war effort, choices they believed to be inherently just and holy. This dissertation challenges this notion by highlighting religious dissent in the South during the antebellum and Civil War eras. It argues that antislavery and anti-Confederate white Southerners imagined their lives and times, and justified their social and political choices, with as much religious urgency as their proslavery and pro-Confederate neighbors. Recognizing Protestant diversity rather than evangelical uniformity, this study insists that there was no religious consensus among whites in the South during the antebellum and Civil War eras.

Traditional religious “others,” particularly Quakers, are major players in this dissertation, but so too are an array of folk Protestants, ranging from “old ship” Methodists to Primitive Baptists. Often locally-minded, they cared little about the mainline churches’ social and political agendas.

The geographic focus of this analysis is primarily on western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia. This dissertation argues that this section of the upcountry was a distinctive area within the South where a variety of religious dissenters lived and interacted. This facilitated a regionally-specific socioreligious exchange that fostered dissent from the social and political mainstreams in the South during the antebellum and Civil War eras.
To Meghann & Cooper
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INTRODUCTION

In the antebellum and Civil War eras, the influence of Southern Evangelicalism—a sectional and seemingly monolithic brand of faith—was more limited than scholars have heretofore recognized. While a distinctively Southern strain of evangelical religion united much of the white South and encouraged many to muster behind the causes of slavery and secession, it failed to do so in significant portions of the Upper South. Particularly in the upcountry where the religious atmosphere was marked by denominational diversity, a number of religious whites rejected the conservative messages exhort ed by the South’s mainline Protestant clergy. Instead, an assortment of religious dissenters challenged the standing order by attacking slavery, denouncing secession, and opposing the Confederate cause. Protestant Christianity aided dissenters, influencing what they defined as “right” as well as whom they defined as “righteous”—and vice versa. This is not to say that dissenters were not motivated by economic, political, and social factors. They undoubtedly were; some more than others. But even when secular concerns were of the utmost importance, religion was never far from the surface. Upcountry dissenters of various socioeconomic backgrounds and denominational callings regularly substantiated their opposition to the status quo by placing it within a religious context.

1I capitalize “Southern Evangelicalism” and “Southern Evangelicals” when referring to the mainline Protestant denominations which, despite ecclesiastical nuances, shared common agendas to advocate slavery and secession. For the most part this includes the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (founded in 1844) and the Southern Baptist Convention (founded in 1845), as well as the Southern wings of the Presbyterian and Episcopal church (which in 1861 embraced secession and formed the Presbyterian Church in the Confederates States of America and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederates States of America).
Moreover, the Protestant diversity which characterized portions of the Upper South produced an atmosphere where challenging the established order—religious, social, and political—was possible. This regionally distinctive religious mix, which dated to the colonial period, persisted into the Civil War era and beyond.² As a result, upcountry residents never fully committed to the Southern Evangelical establishment—or Southern Orthodoxy as I often refer to it—which started to crystallize in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and took full shape in the years following Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831.³ Ultimately, the dominant religious order’s inability to establish a secure foothold in the region weakened its capacity to garner wholesale support for slavery, secession, and the Confederate war among Southern whites.

Over the past few decades, historians have shed a tremendous amount of light on religion in the South. In his pioneering work entitled Religion in the Old South, Donald Mathews helped establish Southern religion as a topic of interest and ongoing importance. Highlighting the interracial and interdenominational nature of Southern worship prior to the Civil War, Mathews argued that Southern Evangelicalism was a distinctive strain of Protestant religion that united believers in the South.⁴ Writing around the same time, John Boles agreed that evangelical religion united religious Southerners. Despite clergy disputes which caused the “Great Revival” to dwindle after 1805, Boles found that religious similarities kept Southern evangelicals united and cooperative during the antebellum era.⁵ Still, other scholars have challenged the unity thesis,

² In the eighteenth century an influx of Anabaptists, Pietists, and other Protestants including Quakers added to the already established presence of Anglicans, as well as backcountry evangelicals who were still being “awakened” by eighteenth century revivals.
³ I often refer to the mainline evangelical denominations as the “Southern Orthodoxy.” This is because they espoused similar zeal in their religious defenses of slavery and secession, as well as in their efforts to sanctify the Confederate cause. Thus, this label alludes to their shared racial and sociopolitical conservatism; it does not suggest that they were theologically or structurally similar. For the purposes of this study, “Southern Orthodoxy” and “Southern Evangelicalism” are largely interchangeable.
collectively arguing that evangelical religion in the South could be divisive, at least in the years prior to 1830. Approximately twenty-five years after the publication of Mathews’s and Boles’s seminal works, Christine Leigh Heyrman and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, for instance, insisted that evangelical revivals drew women and older children who sought a sense of liberation from the social ties that bound them. Yet they posited that Southern men were skeptical of the new religious impulse that seemed to threaten the male-dominated order.6

Despite their nuances, religious historians generally agree that Southern Evangelicalism was socially radical in its early years. At the outset it contained egalitarian and antislavery messages that appealed to marginalized whites as well as Southern blacks. Nevertheless, as historians including Samuel Hill and Beth Barton Schweiger have argued, Southern churches eventually eschewed their radicalism in an effort to gain congregants and clout.7 Most obviously, over time Southern churches collectively amended their stance on slavery. Gradually shifting from reproach to acceptance, by 1830 they championed the “peculiar institution” as a God-ordained system which was inherently Christian.8 Furthermore, as historians including C. C. Goen, Mitchell Snay, and Mark Noll have asserted, religion became a sectional issue as proslavery Southern clergy stepped onto the national stage to defend slavery and denounce abolitionists in the wake of Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831. Pressures over slavery ultimately drove a wedge between Northern and Southern evangelicals and led Southern Methodist, Baptist,
and Presbyterian churches to secede from their national conferences and form their own Southern conventions in 1844, 1845, and 1857 respectively.\(^9\)

Southern dissenters, however, complicate the historiography. Though North-South assessments of American religion are valuable on the macro level, they become problematic when viewed on the micro level, particularly in the South. Using this “traditional” binary construction wrongfully suggests that a collective religious conscience bound whites together within their respective sections, but separated them from Christians residing on the opposite side of the Mason Dixon Line. More particularly, this model falsely insists that Southern whites adhered to a proslavery and pro-Confederate strain of evangelical Protestantism without contest. In sum, this restrictive framework leads to the myth that a uniform and unified white South existed, and, in the process, suggests that antebellum Southern Protestants were of the same ilk. More scholarly attention needs to be paid to the relationship between religion and dissent in order to amend this oversight.

The subject of antislavery in the antebellum South remains an underexplored field. An overarching study exploring the apprehension that some white Southerners felt about slavery remains to be written. However, historians have shed important light on a few of the region’s most outspoken opponents of slavery. The earliest scholarly analysis of note was John Spencer Bassett’s *Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina*, published in 1898.\(^10\) Certainly ahead of its time, Bassett’s brief narrative provides a biographical sketch of a few North Carolinians who voiced their opposition to slavery during the late antebellum era. Among those were Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick and Hinton Rowan Helper, contemporaries whose primary writings in effect

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forged the historiography. Hedrick was a chemistry professor from the North Carolina Piedmont who’s antislavery and “black Republican” expressions caused trustees at the University of North Carolina to dismiss him in 1856. Sensing his dismissal, Hedrick wrote an editorial entitled “Professor Hedrick’s Defence [sic],” which argued that slavery was an “evil” that the Founding Fathers had wanted extinguished in time. The Republican Party, Hedrick insisted, was “on the right side of the great question.” So too, he supposed, were the “majority” of North Carolinians, though silent due to post-Nat Turner legislation.  

11 Hedrick predicted that most North Carolinians would eventually relocate to free states. "Professor Hedrick's Defence," *North Carolina Standard*, October 4, 1856.

His neighbor and contemporary, Hinton R. Helper, agreed.  

12 Helper grew up in Davie County, while Hedrick hailed from Davidson County. The counties border one another in North Carolina’s western Piedmont. Helper and Hedrick were not acquainted in their younger years; however, as public opponents of slavery they became close associates as adults.

13 Interestingly, as a contemporary, Bassett was in correspondence with Helper at the time that he was writing *Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina*. This association no doubt contributed to the book’s commemorative tone, something that I find remarkable in its own right. Written by a white North Carolinian during the “nadir,” Bassett’s choice to champion antislavery whites could lead to interesting questions regarding race and memory in the South in the decades following Reconstruction.
Bailey and George M. Fredrickson criticized Helper for his lack of racial progressivism. Helper only attacked slavery because he believed it negatively impacted Southern whites, they argued; he cared little about those actually in bondage. More recent scholars, including David Brown, have challenged this notion. Helper’s concerns for fellow non-elite whites, Brown insists, did not make him the deliberate racist that Bailey and others painted. Instead, Helper’s dedication to abolition as well as his postwar work with the Republican Party demonstrated that he also had the interests of African Americans at heart. Historians have had less to say about Benjamin S. Hedrick. However, his most recent and thorough biographer, Michael Thomas Smith, concluded that Hedrick, like Helper, was willing to risk his reputation and livelihood to challenge slavery, a brave and noteworthy undertaking even if his racial views had not progressed beyond the century in which he lived.

Additionally, earlier historians generally implied that the antislavery principles held by Helper and Hedrick were isolated cases. However, Smith has argued that Hedrick always identified as a North Carolinian and saw little conflict with his Southern identity and antislavery principles. Similarly, Brown insisted that both men were products of the same Piedmont region, a place where economic anxieties ran high in the late antebellum era. In 1860 up to forty percent of the local white population was landless, and the region’s gradual shift towards raising products to market was only causing land prices to increase. The likelihood that others shared

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their antislavery outlook was high. Unfortunately a lack of documentary evidence leaves questions as to how the non-elite white masses felt about slavery, and why. But Brown is correct in suggesting that Helper and Hedrick did not exist in isolation; rather they were products of a specific environment that cultivated antislavery sentiment. Economic anxieties absolutely weighed in, but so too did religion.

Historians have focused much more attention on Southerners who went against the grain during the Civil War. Since the 1934 publication of Georgia Tatum Lee’s *Disloyalty in the Confederacy*, scholars have been noting that the Civil War era South was not a monolith unwaveringly dedicated to the Confederacy. The trend has picked up momentum in the past few decades as historians have scrutinized divisions in Southern society. In *The South vs. The South*, for instance, William W. Freehling emphasized that “Southern” and “Confederate” were not synonymous by highlighting that blacks and many Border State whites were Southern “anti-Confederates.” Likewise, scholars including Paul Escott, David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson have argued that socioeconomic divisions and class anxieties deteriorated the Southern war effort from within. Other historians have linked Confederate disaffection and disloyalty to prewar Unionism and an initial opposition to secession. James Alex Baggett, for example, has argued that wartime anti-Confederates and postwar Scalawags were mostly ardent Unionists prior to Lincoln’s call for troops in April 1861. Similarly, Margaret Storey has suggested that Alabama Unionists could not support the Confederacy out of a deep-seated love for the United States government largely based on their ancestors’

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17 Brown, “Attacking Slavery from Within,” 575.
participation in the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{21} Still, scholars including John C. Inscoe, Gordon B. McKinney, and Martin Crawford have emphasized the important role that the immediate community played in determining wartime loyalty.\textsuperscript{22} So too has Victoria Bynum, whose work also sheds valuable light on the link between gender and political action.\textsuperscript{23} Positing that loyalties often evolved over the course of the war, these scholars collectively argue that oppressive wartime policies distressed the homefront and caused some white Southerners to gradually withdraw their support from the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite these advances, historians have yet to offer a comprehensive analysis of how religion interacted with social and political dissent during the Civil War era. Thus far, much of the discourse has been limited to denominational histories of religious “outsiders.”\textsuperscript{25} Steven Longenecker’s examination of religion in the Shenandoah Valley, for instance, emphasizes the common roots of Anabaptists and evangelicals, but shows how they diverged over time, with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Margaret M. Storey, \textit{Loyalty and Loss: Alabama’s Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).
  \item \textsuperscript{22} John C. Inscoe & Gordon B. McKinney, \textit{The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Martin Crawford, \textit{Ashe County’s Civil War: Community and Society in the Appalachian South} (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Other historians including Gary Gallagher and William Blair counter these claims. Instead, they argue that Southern whites in general—regardless of social class and economic standing—supported secession after April 1861 and remained devoted to the Confederacy throughout the war. Battlefield victories, they insist, bolstered morale and reaffirmed Confederate support at home. For instance, Gallagher argues that socioeconomic divisions were ultimately insignificant and failed to deteriorate an embedded sense of Confederate nationalism. Similarly, Blair argues that all white Virginians supported the Confederacy based on a common identification with the state’s antebellum social structure. Perhaps their arguments represent portions of the Confederacy, but they do not characterize general sentiment in the upcountry South as analyzed in this dissertation. Two points are particularly problematic. Gallagher and Blair argue that early battlefield victories encouraged support of the Southern war effort and Richmond government that lasted until the end of the war. Upcountry citizens, however, began to reject the Confederacy in earnest at a time when the war’s outcome still held promise for a Southern victory. For upcountry residents, the Confederate government, at both the national and state level, simply failed to build a nationalist spirit. Blair’s insistence that Virginians responded to speculation and conscription with a sense of pro-Confederate sacrifice does not accurately depict the sentiment on the ground in southwestern Virginia. See Gary W. Gallagher, \textit{The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); William Blair, \textit{Virginia’s Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
\end{itemize}
Anabaptists eventually becoming “outsiders” and evangelicals becoming the “mainstream.”

Honing in more specifically on the Civil War, scholars including Samuel Horst, James Lehman, and Steven Nolt have analyzed how Anabaptist pacifists reacted to secession and the Confederate war effort. On a similar note, historians such as Patrick Sowle and Richard Zuber have scrutinized how Quaker pacifists confronted the Civil War, particularly illuminating their struggle to legally opt out of Confederate military service. While this collection of scholarship is of incredible value, the general takeaway is misleading. As a whole they insinuate that white religion in the South consisted of mainstream evangelicals, and, in the shadows, a few fringe “others” who were relatively insular and peerless. Together these studies imply that a few remote communities of Anabaptists and Quakers may have gone against the grain—religiously and politically—but that they operated in virtual isolation.

These “outsiders” can be found in the larger historiography, but usually in regional case studies where religion is peripheral to the larger narrative. For example, in his 1944 study of the Heroes of America in southwest Virginia, Henry T. Shanks suggested that religious scruples inspired Dunkard men in the region to join the secret anti-Confederate society. Nearly forty years later, William T. Auman and David D. Scarboro found that the Heroes of America was especially active in sections of the North Carolina Piedmont which was home to several pacifist and antislavery denominations. So far, Victoria Bynum’s analyses of the North Carolina

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“Quaker Belt” are the most comprehensive, making it clear that religious, political, and social dissent worked in unison in the antebellum and Civil War era South.

Ultimately, the general historiographical trend has been to analyze the relationship between religion, secession, and the Civil War on a strictly North-South basis. As previously mentioned, religious historians including Goen and Snay have illuminated important connections between the development of proslavery Christianity between 1835 and 1860, the denominational schisms within Evangelical churches in the 1840s and 1850s, and a religious justification of secession in the years following.\(^\text{28}\) At the same time, others including Curtis Johnson and Mark Noll have provided intriguing arguments regarding how Southern and Northern evangelicals developed contrasting interpretations of the Bible in order to defend and refute slavery. According to them, seemingly irreconcilable theological differences precipitated secession and war.\(^\text{29}\) Importantly, George C. Rable has recently challenged longstanding trends by highlighting similarities and differences among religious Americans in general, ranging from evangelical Protestants to Catholics to Jews.\(^\text{30}\) Despite the diversity that Rable so aptly underscores, he does not suggest ways in which religious plurality compromised support for slavery and the Confederacy within the South.

Therefore, all in all, religious historians have implied that white Southerners collectively supported slavery, secession, and the Confederate war effort, choices they believed to be inherently just and holy.\(^\text{31}\) As Charles Reagan Wilson insisted in his landmark analysis of the


\(^{31}\) An exception is David B. Chesbrough who argued that a significant number of Southern clergymen opposed secession and the Confederate war effort. Yet, because their Unionist sympathies were in the minority, most chose to keep quiet. Still, Chesbrough’s church leaders were hardly progressives. They were staunch advocates of slavery who believed that the federal government intended to protect the institution as long as peace could be maintained.
Lost Cause, by the outbreak of the Civil War, a conservative Protestant “religious culture” was in place which united white Southerners.\(^3\) While previous scholarship has shed significant light on the distinctive ways in which Northern and Southern Protestants utilized religion, it is time to move beyond this binary approach which fails to take into consideration the ground-level reality of divisions in Southern society. Certainly many Southern whites believed wholeheartedly in the sanctity of slavery, and envisioned the Confederate war as a holy crusade to preserve a blessed national ideal. Many others, however, vehemently hated slavery, secession, and the Confederacy.

This dissertation addresses this incongruity in the historiography by arguing that antislavery and anti-Confederate white Southerners imagined their lives and times, and justified their social and political choices, with as much religious urgency as their proslavery and pro-Confederate neighbors. In the process, I aim to broaden the conception of “Southern religion” and its influence. Historians have largely portrayed Protestantism in the nineteenth century South as a story of unity and division, a dichotomy most often divided along racial lines. However, I challenge this notion by arguing that white Protestantism in the South was hardly monolithic. By highlighting Protestant diversity rather than evangelical uniformity, this dissertation insists that, religiously speaking, there was no Solid South in the antebellum and Civil War eras. Moreover, I also seek to expand upon an implied conception of religious dissent that is altogether too narrow. Traditional religious “others,” such as Dunkards and particularly Quakers, are major players in my study, but so too are an array of folk Protestants ranging from

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“old ship” Methodists to Primitive Baptists. Though rooted in the same religious traditions as the South’s dominant evangelical denominations, folk Protestants were altogether independent.33

Often locally-minded, they cared little about the mainline churches’ social and political agendas.

Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that religion did not create “moral consensus” that united white Southerners.34 The prevalence of folk Protestantism in parts of the South makes this clear. At a time when the majority of those holding economic and political power were eastern and Deep South slaveholding elites, the upcountry preference for independence in faith should also be viewed as an assertion of individual agency and local authority. Therefore, intimately aligned with class consciousness, choosing folk Protestantism provided a means for expressing discontent with the established order.35 Folk Protestants as a whole embraced their “otherness,” defining their faith in contrast to that of the dominant churches, and themselves in contrast to mainline evangelicals who supported a seemingly unjust status quo. Thus, folk Protestant churches may have been held in “cultural captivity.”36 But it

33Primitive Baptists, as Calvinists, would probably disagree with my decision to label them as an “evangelical” sect. However, in this dissertation I apply a loose definition of “evangelical” to simply denote members of Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations.
34 Quoted from C. C. Goen, Broken Churches, Broken Nation, 15. However, as pointed out in the historiographical section of this Introduction, other historians have suggested the same.
35 Historians have convincingly argued that individuals drawn to evangelicalism early on, particularly in the years surrounding the First and Second Great Awakenings, were largely those who were somehow marginalized in society. For example, see Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974); Heyrman, Southern Cross; Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Mathews, Religion in the Old South. This was not a onetime transition, however. As the evangelical denominations evolved into mainline institutions which supported the secular status quo, many Southerners refused to follow. Like the earliest evangelicals, late antebellum and Civil War era folk Protestants used their religious choice as a tool to resist the dominant order. Donald Mathews argues that “evangelicalism in the nineteenth century had become a much different process from the relatively volatile, alienated, defiant, and charismatic movements of the previous century.” While this statement certainly characterizes mainline evangelicals, it fails to take folk Protestants into consideration. Mathews, Religion in the Old South, 82.
36 Since the early 1970s, historians have debated the extent to which Southern churches were influenced by secular culture, and vice versa. In 1972, John Lee Eighmy argued that Southern churches were “captives” of the secular culture. In short, the social and political agendas forwarded by the evangelical churches, mirrored the dominant views of the Southern white population. John Lee Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1972). Others including Charles Reagan Wilson disagree. Arguing that the clergy-built religion of the Lost Cause had tremendous impacts on
was not the “culture” of the dominant South that they reflected. Instead, folk churches mirrored a collection of Southern interests. They were undeniably diverse, yet shared an important trait in common. The Southern Orthodoxy which emblazoned slavery and secession with holy significance was not the church that folk Protestants revered.

The geographic focus of this dissertation is primarily on the upcountry region of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia, the portion of the Upper South where religious dissent was most pronounced. Stretches of particular interest include the Yadkin Valley and portions of the North Carolina Piedmont, the New River Valley in Virginia, and the Holston River Valley, which runs from around Knoxville in East Tennessee to approximately Wytheville in Southwest Virginia. It was in this general locale that a combination of folk Protestants, Quakers, and a variety of German sects prevented the Southern Evangelical establishment from establishing the inroads it needed to garner widespread regional support for its conservative religious, social, and political agendas. It was here that opposition to slavery, secession, and the Confederate war were the most pronounced. However, also included under the upcountry umbrella are various outposts of socioreligious and political dissent, including the Shenandoah Valley, which was an Anabaptist stronghold, and the Richmond vicinity, which was home to a thriving Quaker community. Occasionally, other Upper Southerners who expressed their disapproval with the Southern Orthodoxy are considered.

Southern culture and society, Wilson insists that Southern “culture was a captive of the churches. Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 12. Still, other scholars assert that religion and secular society were mutually influential. For instance, Paul Harvey posits that late nineteenth century struggles between leadership and laity mirrored processes occurring in secular society (i.e., tradition verses modernization). Thus, rather than shaping or being shaped by Southern culture, Harvey argues that “religion and culture . . . [were] inextricably intertwined.” Paul Harvey, Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4.

37 I recognize that “upcountry” generally refers to a broader region within the South, often including western South Carolina, northern Georgia, and northern Alabama. However, for the purpose of this study, “upcountry” primarily refers to the swath of land stretching from approximately Chatham County, North Carolina to Knox County, Tennessee, and then northwards to around Pulaski County, Virginia. This was a distinctive area within the South where a variety of religious dissenters interacted, facilitating a regionally-specific socioreligious exchange.
Figure 1: Map of the Upcountry

Figure 2: Regions within the Upcountry
Although my examination concentrates on the upcountry and a few related satellite locations, I am not implying that religious or political dissent did not happen elsewhere in the South. It did. But only in portions of the Upper South did folk Protestants, Moravians, Quakers, and others live among one another and regularly interact in religious and secular spaces. Therefore, this dissertation argues that religious diversity in the upcountry enabled a regionally distinctive exchange of socioreligious ideas that fostered dissent from the social and political mainstreams in the South during the antebellum and Civil War eras.

Chapter one sets the stage by outlining the process that established religious diversity in the upcountry. It argues that areas where non-evangelical sects settled early on proved to be centers of folk Protestantism in later years. Community associations with Moravians and Quakers, for example, presented viable socioreligious options for neighbors to emulate. Interdenominational cooperation in a variety of formal and informal spaces primed upcountry residents for religious, social, and political dissent. Chapter one also initiates a discussion of slavery, arguing that a denomination’s perspective on slavery largely determined its inclusion in, or exclusion from, the religious mainstream in the early nineteenth century. This contrast more than any other separated antislavery Anabaptists and Quakers from mainline Protestants who progressively embraced a religious justification for slavery. Many white Southerners could tolerate Anabaptist and Quaker pacifism, but found their dogged opposition to slavery unacceptable. Still, others found inspiration in the antislavery zeal that their Quaker neighbors maintained, especially as their evangelical denominations appeared to be straying from the designs of the church founders.

Chapter two incorporates folk Protestants into the discussion of dissent and slavery. It argues that cooperation with pacifist and antislavery denominations, particularly the Society of
Friends, fostered an antislavery spirit in the upcountry. Ties of kin and community crossed state lines and bounded likeminded Protestants together regardless of denomination. At the same time, however, debates within the South over slavery exacerbated church tensions, causing Southern Protestantism to splinter further. As Northern and Southern clergy were debating slavery on the national level in the 1840s and 1850s, upcountry Protestants were going head-to-head over the same issues on the regional level.

The last three chapters turn to secession and the Civil War. Chapter three argues that upcountry Unionists believed disunion to be sheer human error, or “folly” as they often referred to it. Secessionists, no doubt, considered disunion to be of the utmost holy import; separating from the Union, in effect, was the only way to protect a blessed nation and people from corruption and failure. The great hand of Divine Providence, Secessionists imagined, was reaching down from the heavens, urging the people of the South onward. Yet, for prewar Unionists, it was unfathomable to attach religious meaning to an act as treasonous and heretical as secession. Moreover, they were simply unable to attribute a looming national disaster to the agency of the Almighty. Drawing from the same civil religion as their Secessionist neighbors, Unionists demanded that true Christians would resist temptation and remain faithful to God and the country he bequeathed to his chosen subjects.

Continuing in the same vein, chapter four considers the religious manner in which anti-Confederate Southerners interpreted the Civil War. As historians have convincingly illustrated, Confederates, white Northerners, and blacks across the nation found uplifting religious meanings

38 In this dissertation, I use “anti-Confederate” as a catchall term to refer to Southerners who opposed the Confederacy. Some anti-Confederates were unconditional Unionists who never wavered in their devotion to the United States. Perhaps many more, however, were upcountry residents who gradually embraced Unionism over the course of the war. Of these, probably most had been prewar Unionists, but turned to support the Confederacy following President Lincoln’s call for troops in April 1861. Thus, this dissertation is not concerned with prioritizing or debating degrees of loyalty; rather, it moves forward under the assumption that loyalty was fluid.
in the war, even if in individual and largely contrasting ways. Anti-Confederates also interpreted the war through a religious lens, yet, with much less optimism. In contrast to most other Americans—regardless of race or side of the Mason Dixon Line—anti-Confederates insisted that the nation was in the midst of an “unholy war.” Folly may have led the masses into the fray, but after April 1862, disaffected upcountry residents progressively imagined that the Devil walked among them. In the process, repentant backsliders renounced the Confederacy. Born again into the Union, they shunned the path of sin that Secessionists had connivingly led them down. Anti-Confederates looked forward to an eternity with loved ones in Glory, but had no doubt that the Almighty would cast Disunionists and zealous Confederates into the lake of fire and brimstone on Judgment Day.

The last chapter examines the link between religion and anti-Confederate activism in the upcountry. It argues that the Civil War offered a diverse array of Protestant dissenters, ranging from Primitive Baptists to Moravians, a new incentive to cooperate in a common cause. At the same time, it insists that well-established religious and community networks, within and without the Upper South, aided their political dissent. Lastly, chapter five also argues that anti-Confederate activists on the homefront assigned religious significance to their labors. A concluding analysis of the Heroes of America and the grassroots peace movement suggests that both were byproducts of the region’s distinctive interdenominational exchange.

My final confession is to admit that this dissertation only illuminates a portion of the story. When I first set out, I was eager to write about religious Southerners, white and black, who defined their faith in contrast to the pro-slavery and pro-Confederate Southern Orthodoxy. Yet, at the end of the day I opted to concentrate on white dissenters alone. This was not an easy decision. As a historian with particular interests in race and slavery, this blatant omission has
made me a bit self-conscious. However, I hope to explain. My dilemma primarily derived from the available source material. Interestingly, it was not so much a lack of black sources—though that is an ongoing concern—but a pleasantly surprising abundance of white sources that demanded analysis. It seemed a glaring oversight to me that white dissenters are so apparent in the historical record, but are so absent in the historiography. Because Southern blacks are amply represented in recent scholarship, and white dissenters are virtually nonexistent, I decided to devote my attention to illuminating their story. At the same time, I reasoned that it was necessary to come to grips with white religious dissent before I attempted to bring the black-white narratives together in a meaningful fashion.

Narrowing my scope is not to suggest that I did not observe important parallels between white and black religious dissenters. I did. Perhaps most important, black and white folk

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39 Over the past few decades scholars have shed light on how African Americans forged their own brand of evangelical Protestantism, particularly in the years after the Second Great Awakening. Donald Mathews was the first historian to posit that evangelicalism “liberated” blacks as well as whites. In Religion in the Old South he argued that, early on, evangelicalism appealed to blacks because of its anti-slavery message. But even after white evangelicals reversed their stances on slavery in the early nineteenth century, blacks continued to find freedom in their own brand of evangelical religion. Subsequent historians have expanded on Mathews’s liberation thesis. Nathan Hatch and Mechal Sobel, for instance, have demonstrated ways in which black Southerners forged their own religious identities, even with one foot planted in the dominant evangelical structure. Sobel points out ways in which American slaves developed a distinctive strain of “Afro-Christianity” which blended evangelical Protestantism with African folk tradition. Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Mechal Sobel, Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Others such as Eugene Genovese and Albert Raboteau have asserted that religion helped maintain community cohesion in the slave quarters, and also served as a tool that helped slaves endure bondage. Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Albert Raboteau, Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Scholars including Sylvia Frey, Betty Wood, Curtis Johnson, and Mark Noll have argued that evangelical religion influenced political action in the antebellum and Civil War eras. Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). As a collective, these scholars make clear that enslaved blacks developed a tradition of using religion to foster community and to cope with lives in bondage. Moving forward into the Civil War, Johnson and Noll argue that African Americans viewed the war and emancipation as God-ordained. Johnson, Redeeming America; Mark Noll, America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Noll, The Civil War as a Theological Crisis. Other historians have considered the postwar period. Important works by Paul Harvey and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham have shed light on how black evangelicalism—particularly within the black Baptist church—evolved and institutionalized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both demonstrate that religion remained central to the black community after emancipation. Harvey, Redeeming the South; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
Protestants alike rejected the tenets of Southern Evangelicalism that they found less than convincing, and chose to, instead, interpret Scripture according to their own conscience. In the process, folk religion enabled black and white dissenters to construct an alternative framework for interpreting and analyzing the world in which they lived—a framework drastically different from the conservative structure then in place and upheld by the mainline churches of the day. Also similar, regardless of race, folk Protestants espoused their own understandings of righteousness and morality—as well as sinfulness—and used their distinctive brands of faith to validate it. Of course, there were differences between black and white folk Protestants as well, just as there were variances between white Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Baptists, for instance. Perhaps most obvious, Southern blacks would have hardly agreed with white anti-Confederates that the Civil War was an unholy struggle that only served to anger God. Quite the opposite, as historians have well illustrated, blacks interpreted the Civil War as a God-ordained struggle for emancipation. Anticipating the long-awaited coming of Jubilo, it was a prediction that many had made well before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, not to mention the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment which finalized freedom—or perhaps more accurately, *initiated* a long road to freedom.

Still, their similarities, as well as their differences, are in need of attention. Most compelling to me is that, during Reconstruction, black and white folk Protestants in the upcountry found reasons to come together, a cooperative mission that was as holy as it was political. Historians have argued that black and white Southern Christians went their own ways after 1865.\(^40\) With emancipation came the freedom to legally construct and worship in black

\(^{40}\) For instance, see Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, and Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*. During the antebellum era blacks and whites had often worshiped together. The power structure, of course, had not been equal. Interracial worship took place in white churches, under the authority of white preachers. Even though blacks and whites occupied common religious spaces, they were usually segregated. Slaves generally stood around the perimeter of the
churches, a right that most freedpeople wasted no time in exercising. But it should not be viewed simply as a story of separation. During Reconstruction, the Republican Party and its supporting institutions such as the Union League of America formed a new interracial church where “the Unionists of both races” congregated and cooperated.  

It was in this brief moment that black and white folk Protestants pulled together for the first time en masse to construct something new and righteous to supplant an outdated order which both agreed had been rooted in sin and greed. I point towards this significant, albeit short-lived, stint in the epilogue, and intend to expand upon it in much greater detail in later revisions and future work. While I hope this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of religion and dissent in the nineteenth century South, I imagine it to be a mere stepping stone to a more inclusive examination moving forward.

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sanctuary or were relegated to the balcony. For a discussion of interracial worship, see Mathews, Religion in the Old South.

41 Jacob W. Brower to Officers of the Grand Council of North Carolina, Union League of America, June 15, 1867, quoted in Steven A. Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 189, 523. Jacob Brower was the President of the interracial Hamburg Lodge chapter of the Union League of America located in Mount Airy, Surry County, North Carolina.
CHAPTER I

“HELPMEETS TO EACH OTHER THRO LIFES UNEVEN JOURNEY”: UPCOUNTRY PROTESTANTS & SEEDS OF DISSENT

A religious establishment emerged in the South during the first half of the nineteenth century that was increasingly bent on reinforcing the secular status quo and evangelizing white Southerners. The mainline Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches, which constituted the religious establishment, in effect, the Southern Orthodoxy, eventually gained sway across the South. Importantly, however, its churches failed to draw wholesale support in the Upper South, particularly in portions of the North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee upcountry where religious diversity was already a cornerstone of the environment. This fact should not imply that the Southern Orthodoxy was absent in the region. Certainly hundreds of upcountry residents felt perfectly at home in mainline churches and supported the agendas they pushed. Yet, others were uncomfortable in mainstream churches which appeared to be gradually straying from the denominational founders’ morals and designs. Over time, upcountry whites disillusioned by the dominant religious order dissented, albeit by degrees, and crafted a religious identity that stood counter to that of mainline Southern Evangelicals.

The Southern upcountry’s religious complexity was largely shaped by outmigration from Pennsylvania. Starting in the eighteenth century, droves of settlers made their exodus from Pennsylvania traveling south along the Great Wagon Road and its offshoots in search of land. The primary road bisected the Shenandoah Valley and terminated in the Yadkin Valley of North
Carolina. Additional spurs carried settlers further west into Appalachia, and, to a lesser extent, points to the east. Mostly of English, Scots-Irish, and German descent, they established a multitude of communities and churches throughout the mountains and foothills of the Upper South. Still, the Upper South states did not develop along identical paths. Settlement patterns differed in each state, allowing marked nuances and unequal denominational distribution to distinguish one from another. Because migrants often chose to live among others with whom they shared religious or national identities, locally unique ethnic and denominational concentrations developed that stood the test of time.

German Protestant groups established communities throughout the upcountry. In the mid-eighteenth century German-speaking Moravians founded Salem and a series of interrelated communities in a tract of land they called Wachovia in North Carolina’s western Piedmont. While Moravian religion proved influential in parts of the North Carolina foothills, Moravianism in the South remained a North Carolina phenomenon until after the Civil War. Likewise, rooted in a common religious tradition, German Anabaptists, mostly Mennonites and members of the German Baptist Brethren, commonly referred to as “Dunkards,” settled among one another en masse in the Shenandoah Valley, and to a lesser extent around the New River Valley in southwestern Virginia. Other German Protestant groups were more evenly distributed. In North Carolina members of the Lutheran and German Reformed churches built communities and congregations near the Yadkin Valley, many of which were within close proximity to the

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Moravians. Lutherans and members of the Reformed church also settled in the mountains of Virginia and around the Shenandoah Valley near Anabaptists.

Mostly of English descent, members of the Society of Friends, often referred to by their neighbors as Quakers, also built communities in the Upper South. Hailing from Pennsylvania and Nantucket, Quakers resided in all three Upper South states by the antebellum era. Most Southern Quakers lived in an area encompassing approximately eight counties in the central and western Piedmont of North Carolina. Yet sizeable Quaker communities also existed in the northern Shenandoah Valley, parts of central Virginia, and around Richmond. Smaller Quaker settlements dotted the Tennessee hill country. Quakers were a tight-knit group. Though geographically scattered, family and community networks connected Upper South Quakers to one another, as well as to Quakers outside of the region. Over time Quakers became central actors in the vicinities around their strongholds, ultimately proving influential in the socioreligious development of the surrounding upcountry community during the antebellum era.

Quakers, Anabaptists, and other German Protestants such as Moravians and Lutherans were not alone in the Upper South. As elsewhere in the southern United States, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were also locally prevalent. Certainly many of the region’s evangelical churches fit neatly within the mainstream Southern Orthodoxy. But others did not. In the upcountry, Methodists and Baptists occasionally severed ties with their parent church and

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2 Though the term “Quaker” was commonly used by the nineteenth century, Levi Coffin, a member of the Society of Friends, noted in his memoir that the “name [was] given in derision by our persecutors in the early rise of the society.” Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives, Who Gained Their Freedom Through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents, second ed. (Cincinnati: Robert Clark & Co., 1880), 501.

established independent congregations, or even denominations, which better suited their ecclesiastical tastes and moral consciences. Folk Protestants who dissented from the mainline over questions of church government, Christian responsibility, and interpretations of Scripture announced their discontent with the Southern Evangelical establishment. Consequently, folk Protestants cared little about the social or political exhortations of mainline preachers who, they believed, espoused doctrines that were ungodly and out of touch with “true” religion.

Therefore, when taken in its entirety, the Upper South presents an extraordinary challenge to the notion of a unified evangelical South. By the antebellum period, religious diversity, the result of northern outmigration and local rejections of the religious mainstream, characterized much of the North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, the upland regions in particular. As an increasingly myopic and sectional brand of white evangelical religion came to justify the status quo in the South during the first half of the nineteenth century, denominational diversity in the upcountry offered religious choices and nurtured dissent. Significantly, and certainly not coincidentally, the areas where religious diversity flourished early on proved to be centers of a new type of religious dissent in the early nineteenth century as folk Protestants began separating themselves from parent denominations.

**Moravians, Lutherans, & German Reformed**

Members of a variety of German Protestant groups migrated to the upland South starting in the eighteenth century. Among these were Moravians, German Reformed, and Lutherans who often settled close to one another and participated in the same community. Though they adhered to distinctive denominational traditions, members of these Protestant sects often found religious commonalities and cultural similarities that encouraged cooperation in America. German-descended Anabaptists, most of which were Dunkards, also settled in the parts of upcountry,
particularly in Virginia. Though Anabaptists did not quarantine themselves from those of other religious traditions, their unique brand of faith which encouraged them to isolate themselves from the secular world as much as possible inhibited their ability to make significant inroads with the larger community.

Sprouting from seeds of dissent planted prior to the Protestant Reformation, the Moravian Church traces its origin to the teachings of John Hus who initiated a religious movement around Bohemia and Moravia at the turn of the fifteenth century. Dissatisfied with the state of the Catholic Church, particularly the clergy’s practice of withholding the sacrament of Communion from those they deemed unworthy, Hus encouraged Christians to return to a “primitive” religion inspired by the examples of Christ in the New Testament. Despite progressive growth early on, the religious movement initially known as the Unitas Fratrum, or Unity of the Brethren, later dwindled due to persecution during the Counter Reformation. Incidentally, the Catholic establishment condemned Hus as a heretic and burned him at the stake in 1415. However, over three centuries later a group of Pietists under the direction of Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf established a spiritual community in Herrnhut where they revived the Unitas Fratrum and organized the Moravian Church in 1727. The reconstituted Brethren advocated a radical brand of evangelical “heart religion” that championed personal religious experience and spiritual inclusiveness. According to religious historian S. Scott Roher, Zinzendorf’s relationship with his faith was almost “mystical.” Believing salvation was open to all, Zinzendorf made evangelism through missionary work a central charge of early Moravianism.4

The Lutheran and German Reformed churches both date to the earliest moments of the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth century Germany. However, each traces individual lineages

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and dogmas. Taking the name of the movement’s initiator, the Lutheran Church dedicated itself to the doctrines espoused by Martin Luther, namely the belief that “faith alone”—rather than good works, which a Christian should do naturally—affect one’s salvation from sin. In the years that followed, Lutheranism in Germany became more complex and splintered as it interacted with newly emerging Protestant beliefs and practices. The emerging Pietist movement, which pointed Christians toward a heartfelt personal faith rather than impersonal doctrine-driven religion, proved both influential and divisive to Lutherans, dividing Lutheran Pietists who preferred a “religion of the heart” and “orthodox” Lutherans who, as Pietists insisted, practiced a “religion of the head.”\(^5\) Pietism was particularly influential among Lutherans migrants to Pennsylvania, including Henry Melchior Muhlenberg a seminary trained minister who organized grassroots church bodies in eighteenth century Pennsylvania into the first formal Lutheran denominational structure in eighteenth century America.\(^6\)

The Reformed Church followed the teachings of John Calvin. Predestinarian in nature, members of the German Reformed Church traditionally held that humans had no ability to affect their own salvation; God’s elect alone would be saved. However, in time some German Reformed congregations became more Lutheran-leaning. The Pietist movement, which was sweeping across Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, affected the German Reformed church as well. Pietism encouraged some Reformed congregations to abandon strict Calvinism, at times influencing Reformed Protestants to participate in eighteenth century revivals.\(^7\) Lutheranism and Pietism continued to prove influential on Reformed congregations in

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colonial America. Starting anew in Pennsylvania, Reformed migrants, as well as other Germans, found the freedom to redefine their faith on their own terms.⁸

Shortly after arriving in America, waves of Germans left Pennsylvania to establish lives further south. By the American Revolution German settlements extended from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia to the Yadkin Valley in North Carolina. Selecting jump-off points up and down the Great Wagon Road, in effect today’s I-81 and I-77 corridors, members of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions settled throughout the upcountry region. Moravians, however, were more geographically concentrated. Preferring to build a politically cohesive and tight-knit spiritual community, Moravians settled together in a nearly 100,000 acre tract of land the North Carolina foothills. Purchased around 1750 by Moravian leaders in the Old Country, Wachovia, as they named the district, was comprised of much of modern day Forsyth County and the surrounding vicinity. Settlements in Wachovia included Bethabera founded in 1753, Bethania founded in 1759, and Salem, the social, political, and religious center of Wachovia, in 1766.

Once in the backcountry, Germans often settled close to one another where, despite surface denominational differences, they participated in common social and religious communities. Lutheran and Reformed settlers in the Shenandoah Valley built “union houses” such as Peaked Mountain Church in 1768 in Rockingham County and Davidsburg Church in 1790 in Augusta County, which were jointly owned and used by both congregations.⁹ A similar process occurred along the North Carolina frontier where, according to Reverend George William Werker, a nineteenth century German Reformed minister and church historian,

⁹ John Waters Wayland, “The German Element of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1907), 113.
Reformed and Lutheran migrants commonly established “union churches.”10 Appearing little concerned with denominational nuances, local Lutherans and Reformed resolved that “since we are both united in the principle doctrines of Christianity, we find no difference between us except in name.”11

Moravians also interacted with their neighbors, many of whom were German Protestants. Despite maintaining a close relationship between church and state within Wachovia’s borders, particularly in the town jurisdictions, Moravians did not isolate themselves from others on their periphery. Salem became a thriving economic center in the late eighteenth century, and would remain as much through the Civil War era. Furthermore, Moravians welcomed their non-Moravian neighbors to participate in their religious activities without obligation to convert. Perhaps interdenominational cooperation was strongest in the Landgemeinen, or “farm congregations” that were located in southern Wachovia at a relative distance from the theocratic town centers. In rural settlements such as Friedberg, Friedland, and Hope, Moravians and non-Moravians—the vast majority of which were German Reformed or Lutheran—settled alongside one another and worshiped together.12

German Protestants ran both parallel with, and counter to, the Southern mainstream, a process in which the Moravians stand out most clearly. Like the dominant evangelical sects, they altered their course over time in order to retain relevance in a modernizing world. The Moravian Church, for instance, progressively relaxed its commitment to pacifism, as well as its

12 In 1800 nearly ninety percent of Wachovia’s residents were of German descent. Rohrer, Hope’s Promise, xxiv-xxv.
proscriptions against slavery. On the ground level, however, many Southern Moravians maintained a strong sense of identity that was not far removed from those principles. In time, especially during the Civil War era, Moravian dissent became more noticeable, and in fact, influential in North Carolina’s northwestern foothills.

![Map of North Carolina showing the location of Wachovia.](image)

Figure 3: Location of Wachovia

However, the presence of a variety of German Protestant groups had more immediate significance in the interim. Together, Moravians, Lutherans, and German Reformed added to the religious complexity of the Southern upcountry. In the process, they presented to others religious options that were less accessible in most of the South. Additionally, the availability of religious choice, in turn, made religious dissent a viable option for residents of the region disaffected by the emerging Southern Orthodoxy. That most upcountry residents would never defect to a German church—though many did—is beside the point.\(^\text{13}\) Cooperation with Protestants from “nontraditional” Southern churches helped influence dissent on the religious, social, and political levels in the years to come.

**Anabaptists**

Anabaptism was a radical form of Protestantism that emerged out of socioreligious disaffection in Europe during the early sixteenth century. As products of the Protestant Reformation, Anabaptist denominations including the Mennonites, Dunkards, and Amish shared common principles and origins in the regional unrest of the day. Religious and social in nature, early Anabaptism was a radical movement that mixed theology with class consciousness and antiestablishmentism. Disaffected by local power structures and the religious requirements they imposed, in the 1520s German and Low Country farmers, artisans, and laborers began forming new religious communities. Likely in response to their collective frustration with the power holders of the day, early Anabaptists began charging that one’s piety and actions on earth could affect salvation or damnation in the hereafter. Though initially loose-knit, the Anabaptist movement began to coalesce under the direction of Menno Simons whose followers became recognized as Mennonites. Internal disputes caused the Mennonite Church to fracture into additional denominations including the Amish under the leadership of Jacob Amman in 1693 and the Brethren, or Dunkards, under the leadership of Alexander Mack in 1708. Yet despite their nuances, Anabaptist groups maintained important similarities. As a whole they remained dedicated to upholding the vision of Menno Simons whose mixture of Anabaptist tradition and new policies regarding church members and their relationship with the world established modern Anabaptism as it would later be practiced in the United States.14

Anabaptist denominations shared fundamental beliefs and practices based in their particular understanding of free will theology. Rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, Anabaptists held that Christians must actively seek salvation in Christ. Their conviction that individuals were responsible for their own salvation impacted the way that Anabaptists defined

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religious responsibility and the way in which they interacted with the world. Adult baptism remained a key tenet of all Anabaptist denominations. From the movement’s inception, church leaders espoused their disapproval with infant baptism, a practice they insisted was illegitimate in the eyes of God. Instead, favoring human agency in salvation, Anabaptists insisted that baptism should be claimed by adults who consciously seek Christ and the forgiveness of their sins. Furthermore, Anabaptists maintained a minimalist worldview. Preferring a faith that was theologically simple, from the earliest days Anabaptists used the fundamental teachings of the New Testament as their guidebook. Moving forward from their interpretation of Scripture, they rejected materialism and preferred to live plainly. In addition to these foundational principles, eighteenth and nineteenth century Anabaptists followed Menno Simons call to practice pacifism and to seek salvation by avoiding “worldly” corruption and sin. Insisting that sin had corrupted society to a point that was likely irreversible, Anabaptists preferred to focus inward on individual purity and perfection within their own “community of believers.”

Religious persecution and social upheaval in Europe encouraged Anabaptists to migrate to America starting in the eighteenth century. Following their arrival in Pennsylvania and their subsequent migration south into the Shenandoah Valley, Anabaptists remained dedicated to the religious precepts of Simons and other early church leaders. In America, Anabaptist sects maintained ecclesiastical boundaries, but often settled around one another and built communities together. While their faith and practice had stood opposed to the religious mainstreams in the German and Low Country regions from which they came, the presence of Dunkards, Mennonites, and Amish simply added to the complex religious atmosphere already in place in Pennsylvania and developing in Virginia. As religious historian Stephen Longenecker explains,

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15 The term “Anabaptist” means “rebaptizer.”
at the turn of the nineteenth century Anabaptists in the Shenandoah Valley were virtually indistinguishable from other Protestants, including evangelicals. Theological differences certainly existed. But like Anabaptists, Longenecker argues, early evangelicals were also religious “outsiders” that rejected the corrupt world and sought solace in their church community and the promise of salvation.  

The divide between Anabaptists and evangelicals in the Upper South became more pronounced throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. During this time evangelical denominations moved into the mainstream as the Methodist and Baptist leadership organized new efforts to modernize their churches. As part of the modernizing process, evangelicals pushed to move their churches from relative social and religious insignificance to positions of influence within Southern society. But as evangelicals increasingly struggled to engage with the world, Anabaptists’ ongoing commitment to individual purity required them to keep the secular world at arm’s length. Therefore, Anabaptists rarely attempted to affect the social or political status quo. Anabaptists avoided the material mainstream as much as possible, many refusing to vote or participate in government. 

Anabaptists and evangelicals may have increasingly disagreed on the extent to which Christians should become involved in secular society; however, their enduring opposition to slavery is what primarily defined Anabaptists as dissenters from the socioreligious establishment in the antebellum South. As part of their mission to gain influence, evangelical institutions turned to support slavery in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Anabaptists,

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17 Longenecker, Shenandoah Religion, 3-12.
however, held fast to their conviction that slavery was one of the many sins that corrupted the world. Anabaptist leaders had little religious motivation to force an antislavery agenda on secular society. But anxious to maintain purity within their own ranks, they were deeply concerned with promoting antislavery principles within their own churches. Additionally, though they were in no way secular reformers, Anabaptists were not opposed to leading by example.

Striving toward purity on earth and salvation in death, Dunkards and Mennonites began washing their hands of the sin of slavery during the eighteenth century. Before migrating south, Pennsylvania Anabaptists initiated a process of refusing membership to slaveholders. Rather than leaving their antislavery proclivities behind, Anabaptist migrants from Pennsylvania brought their opposition to slavery with them to the Shenandoah and New River Valleys. Throughout the antebellum era, Southern Anabaptists maintained ties with their Northern brethren, and life in Virginia appears to have had little impact on their religious opposition to slavery. At a series of Annual Meetings between 1812 and 1857, Dunkard leaders representing congregations from both sides of the Mason Dixon Line expressed to one another their desire for slavery to end in the United States. In 1855 a separate assembly of Virginia Dunkards echoed the Annual Meeting’s antislavery stance. The Mennonite leadership in the South was less vocal on slavery than the local Dunkard clergy. Though the church never released an official antislavery statement, Mennonite leaders in Virginia occasionally alluded to the Southern church’s position.20 In an 1837 pamphlet entitled The Confession of Faith, Mennonite minister Peter Burkholder asserted that “all are free in Christ,” and that Mennonites should “take no part

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20 Sappington, “Church of the Brethren,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, 206; Steve Longenecker, “Shenandoah Valley Anabaptists and the Secession Crisis of 1861” (Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center At Weaver’s Mennonite Church, April 10, 2011), 5
in slave-holding” or the slave trade. Nearly thirty years later, in 1864 a conference of Mennonite churches in Virginia acknowledged that “it is against our creed[,] Attitude[,] and discipline to own or traffic in slaves.”

Anabaptist opposition to slavery was more apparent on the ground level. Southern Claims Commission interviews collected in the Shenandoah Valley in the 1870s illustrate how closely Dunkards and Mennonites associated antislavery principles with their faith. Information gathered in the depositions also implies that non-Anabaptist neighbors understood that Dunkards and Mennonites had been religiously opposed to the institution. In 1871 Fannie Rhodes, a sixty-four year old widow who was “born and raised” in Rockingham County, Virginia insisted that her family “were all Mennonites, and never had any sympathy with Slavery . . . and would have nothing to do with it.” A few years later, Henry L. Rhodes informed a federal commissioner that his family who lived near Mount Crawford in Rockingham County were “Mennonite and natural union people” who were also “opposed to slavery” prior to the Civil War. Similarly, in 1871 Daniel Flory, a forty-two year old farmer who had also spent his life to date in Rockingham County stated that “I was opposed to Slavery from principle. I am now and was then, a Member of the Dunker Church.” As these statements suggest, upcountry Anabaptists were aware that others associated their denominations with antislavery. While most Southern Claims Commission interviewees did not mention religion, Shenandoah Valley Dunkards and Mennonites rarely failed to point out their Anabaptist backgrounds to federal claims officers.

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21 Peter Burkholder, The Confession of Faith, of the Christians Known by the Name of Mennonites, in Thirty-Three Articles; with a Short Extract from Their Catechism (Winchester, VA: Robinson & Hollis, 1837), 419.
24 Ibid, 251.
25 Ibid, 492.
Anabaptists in the Upper South remained socioreligious “outsiders” throughout the antebellum and Civil War eras. While Anabaptists and evangelicals shared fundamental principles early on, their differences became more apparent over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century as evangelicals evolved and Anabaptists remained constant. It was Anabaptists’ unwavering opposition to slavery, however, that primarily defined their dissent in the antebellum era. In contrast to the Southern Evangelical establishment, Virginia Anabaptists maintained a religiously-motivated antislavery ethic. Yet despite their aversion to slavery, Anabaptists as a whole were far from crusaders for worldly reform. As John Kline, a Shenandoah Valley Dunkard elder explained in 1844, the subjects of slavery and slaveholding were “a very delicate matter to act upon in the present sensitive condition,” and “it is the aim of the Brethren here not to offend popular feeling” when possible.26 Therefore, Kline’s and other Anabaptists’ desires to tread lightly in matters that lay outside of their own spiritual community best explains their passivity to slavery. Their dedication to attaining Christian perfection encouraged insularity and precluded most Anabaptists from pushing for reform beyond the borders of their own church community. Though they held no reservations about the sinfulness of slavery, Anabaptists were not inclined to concern themselves with a world they considered too deep in corruption to redeem.27 Instead, they chose to distance themselves from the institution, striving instead for individual salvation and looking forward to a life in eternity where corruption and sin would be no more.

The Society of Friends

Emerging out of England’s Protestant Reformation, the Society of Friends traces its origin to George Fox who began preaching a radical new religious and social message in Lancashire, England in the mid-seventeenth century. Departing from the Anglican and Puritan establishments of the day, Fox and his followers deemphasized the importance of clergy and liturgy and insisted instead that all “seekers of the light” could directly access God. Quakers also used Scripture and reason to challenge the social standards of the time, including their early support for gender equality. Like Anabaptists and Moravians, Quakers avoided excessive luxury and championed nonviolence. Though they all shared fundamental principles derived from the New Testament, Quakers adhered to an especially unique form of Protestant theology, and were socially different from Anabaptists in particular.

Quaker theology was planted firmly in the conviction that a combination of Scripture and personal revelation allowed Christians to access God and his divine word directly. According to Fox and later adherents to Quakerism, the Old and New Testaments were inspired by God and revealed the Creator’s will for his people. Therefore, the Bible alone provided the blueprint Christians should use to order the world and structure their lives. Any religious professions that strayed from the spirit of the Bible, Quakers held, were false doctrines generated under the influence of Satan. Perhaps most important, a belief that God endowed all humans with a Divine spark was at the core of Quaker theology. The same Holy influence that guided the Scripture writers was available to all devout seekers. Thus, Quakers held that “true” Christians could tap into their “Inner Light” and achieve communion with the Holy Spirit. Once realized, the Inner Light would manifest itself through the individual conscience. Christian reason, in effect, should serve as a moral compass. The Inner Light, in spiritual union with the Almighty, can leave no
doubt as to what is morally right and what is morally wrong. However, Quakers warned that one must be careful. “Natural reason”—reason which is not in tune with the Divine spark—was often misleading and could guide half-hearted seekers along a path of sin.  

George Fox’s religious vision included a radical alternative social philosophy. Viewing materialism and social inequalities as evidence of corruption, Fox and subsequent church leaders encouraged “plainness” in dress and lifestyle, as well as in conversation. Wary of pomp, Quakers often avoided ornamentation in their outward display. In an effort to disregard human constructed social rankings, early Quakers at times refused to address authorities by titles and maintained the style of “plain speech” that the common class employed in seventeenth century England. Perhaps Quakers’ most radical statement early on, however, was their commitment to gender equality that dates to the movement’s inception. In the mid seventeenth century George Fox and subsequent Quaker leaders used Scripture to insist that gender inequalities were not grounded in Truth. Laboring for gender equality in the church, in a 1666 pamphlet entitled “Women Speaking Justified,” religious activist Mary Fell used examples from Scripture to prove that God intended women to act as spiritual leaders. Appealing to the “spiritual equality” of all Christians, Fox, Fell, and fellow Quaker leaders established an egalitarian church structure that extended leadership roles to Quaker women, including participation in the ministry.

Quakers began arriving in America within years of the movement’s inception. The earliest Quaker immigrants faced persecution under the Puritan establishment in Massachusetts Bay, where colonial leaders banned Quakerism under the penalty of death. While some migrant Quakers fell victim to the witch-hunt, others found refuge among religious dissenters in Rhode Island. Quaker persecution in the region declined in the decades that followed. Quaker communities dotted the New England landscape by the early eighteenth century, including a particularly strong community on Nantucket Island. Other Quaker migrants established communities in the middle colonies, especially Pennsylvania founded by Quaker William Penn in 1681. Quakers built communities in the southern colonies as well. Relatively short-lived Quaker communities emerged along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia during the colonial period, but a gradual decline in membership eventually caused them to fold. At the turn of the eighteenth century Quakers also formed communities in the coastal regions of northeast North Carolina and parts of eastern Virginia. However, in the mid eighteenth century, a new wave of Quakers from Pennsylvania and Nantucket began settling in portions of the upcountry. In the process, the center of Quakerism in the South shifted from east to west as newly arriving Friends established active communities, particularly in the piedmont and foothill regions of North Carolina. Quakerism eventually proved influential on the upcountry vicinities surrounding Quaker settlements.

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Quakers both stood apart from, and blended with, their non-Quaker neighbors in the Upper South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Religious peculiarities occasionally set Quakers apart. As pacifists, most Quaker men refused to bear arms during the Revolutionary War, a choice which caused some North Carolinians to question their political allegiance.\textsuperscript{32} Additionally, a religious proscription against taking oaths also underscored Quaker difference, particularly on court days when Quaker men opted to “affirm,” rather than swear to, their testimony.\textsuperscript{33} But for the most part, upcountry Quakers were not wholly different from other Protestants in the region. Like Quakers, evangelicals and Pietists also sought a direct experience with God and many preferred plainness to materialism in the decades following the First Great Awakening. Loose settlement patterns in the upcountry South encouraged Protestants, regardless of denomination, to worship together in the late eighteenth century. In the process,

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Quakers and non-Quakers initiated a tradition of community and family building in the upcountry that persisted into the nineteenth century.

Quaker attitudes regarding slavery were in step with other Protestants in the South during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Evangelicals in the South did not begin the process of constructing a united front in favor of slavery until approximately a decade or more following the Second Great Awakening. While some evangelicals held no moral reservations with holding humans in bondage, at the turn of the nineteenth century a number of evangelicals in the South expressed their displeasure with slavery, at times welcoming slaves into their congregations while denying membership to slaveowners. Quakers were similar. Initially, the Society of Friends did not take a definitive position on slavery, defining one’s participation in the institution as a matter of conscience, rather than a church matter. Thus some eighteenth century Southern Quakers chose to own slaves, as well as participate in the slave trade. Most slaveholding Quakers hailed from the earliest centers of Quakerism in the South, particularly the vicinity of the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina and along the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. But during the second half of the eighteenth century Northern Quakers increasingly criticized their Southern brethren for participating in the institution and urged them to change their sinful ways. After a 1754 visit to Quaker settlements in eastern North Carolina and Virginia, English Quakers Samuel Fothergill and Joshua Dixon, complained that a portion were “negro-keepers.” Around the same time, John Woolman, a Friend from New Jersey, ridiculed Quakers who participated in slaveholding, asserting that “a spirit of fierceness and the love of dominion too generally prevailed” in Southern Quaker communities. Ten years later, in 1765 New Jersey

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36 Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, 201.
Friend John Griffith brought his antislavery campaign to North Carolina and Virginia where he proclaimed before slaveholding Quakers that bondage was “as contrary to the spirit of Christianity as light is to darkness.”

Wholesale Quaker commitment to antislavery began to slowly crystallize during the late eighteenth century. Northern chastisements undoubtedly influenced some Southern Quakers to reconsider their moral obligation to challenge injustice and “love thy neighbor.” However, the influx of Pennsylvania and Nantucket Quakers into the Southern backcountry, particularly the North Carolina Piedmont, proved to be the most significant influence. Their migration caused the center of Quakerism in the South to shift from the eastern coastal plain to the central and western upcountry. Bringing their marked antislavery views along with them into the Upper South, these transplants helped redefine Southern Quakerism in the years following the American Revolution. No longer willing to accept complicity in slavery and the slave trade, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, upcountry Quakers initiated a progressive course of antislavery activism that advanced steadily by degrees.

In the years following the turn of the nineteenth century, Quakers in the upcountry began insisting that slavery should be fully abolished. But emancipation, they felt, should be a gradual process. Fearing that immediate abolition would cause economic and social disorder, opponents of slavery hoped to garner support for their cause by promoting a slow path to freedom which they believed would safely and effectively eradicate slavery over time. Years later, antislavery leader Levi Coffin remembered that “some plan of gradual manumission was the theme of general discussion at that day, but none of the advocates spoke or seemed to think of immediate

\[37\] Ibid., 203.
and unconditional emancipation.”\textsuperscript{39} Quakers led the charge for gradual emancipation in the upcountry, but they were not the only supporters of the program. In the late eighteenth century, backcountry Quakers encouraged, rather successfully, their slaveholding brethren in the long-established communities along the North Carolina and Virginia coasts, to emancipate their slaves. The democratic spirit that pervaded the socioreligious atmosphere following the American Revolution and the Great Awakenings also encouraged evangelicals and some slaveholders to embrace gradual emancipation as the proper course under God and for the benefit of the nation.\textsuperscript{40}

Gradual emancipation enjoyed popular support among Quakers and some evangelicals on the ground level; however, longstanding Southern laws threatened it in practice. During the colonial period, the General Assemblies in North Carolina and Virginia passed a series of manumission laws prohibiting slaveholders from emancipating slaves at will. Instead, legislatures established criteria for emancipation and placed the ability to manumit slaves solely in the hands of the respective state assemblies. Though lawmakers had established these proscriptions prior to statehood, for the most part, after 1776, the new state governments continued to respect legislation restricting manumission.\textsuperscript{41} Yet the states faced protests from Quakers and other Southerners making a post-Revolution push for gradual emancipation.

In response, upcountry Quakers developed a church-sponsored program that allowed slaveholders to emancipate their slaves via a legal loophole. Taking advantage of a 1796 North

\textsuperscript{39} Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 74.
\textsuperscript{40} For a discussion of the democratic spirit that characterized religious life in the United States following the American Revolution, see Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
\textsuperscript{41} In 1782 Virginia amended its manumission law to allow slaveowners the right to emancipate slaves in their final will. However, subsequent legislation made manumission more difficult. Additionally, Virginia progressively enacted laws that threatened the status and rights of emancipated blacks within the state. Library of Virginia, “Deed of Manumission for Francis Drake, May 23, 1791,” Virginia Memory, Library of Virginia, http://www.virginiamemory.com/online_classroom/shaping_the_constitution/doc/drake (accessed August 23, 2013).
Carolina law that extended property rights to societies, starting in 1808 North Carolina Quakers encouraged slaveholders to deed their human chattel over to the North Carolina Yearly Meeting, a conference consisting of all Quaker congregations in the state. By 1814 former masters had transferred approximately eight hundred slaves to the Yearly Meeting, and the numbers continued to climb.\(^\text{42}\) For instance, in 1816, a slaveholder from Surry County, North Carolina deeded thirteen of his former slaves over to “the Quakers.”\(^\text{43}\) But all in all, progress was slow. Slaves purchased by the North Carolina Yearly Meeting remained, at least temporarily, in bondage. Upcountry Quakers leading the manumission program planned to remove slaves now under their jurisdiction to freedom in the Midwest as time and resources allowed. In the interim, however, law required that they remain in bondage. The Yearly Meeting established a relocation fund which allowed church-held slaves to contribute wages they earned through hiring out.\(^\text{44}\) Property deeds from Surry County, North Carolina indicate that the Yearly Meeting was still operating the manumission program in 1833.\(^\text{45}\) Slave transfers, however, dwindled to a halt following the Nat Turner Rebellion. New legislation passed in the early 1830s further restricted antislavery activity in the South, and forced the North Carolina Yearly Meeting to discontinue its manumission program.

Coinciding with the Yearly Meeting’s emancipationist activities, Quakers also led the charge to establish interdenominational manumission societies in the upcountry that were secular


\(^{43}\) The names of the slaves were Aaron, Annis, Aury, George, Isaac, Jim, Martin, Merriman, Milla, Nancy, Rachel, Richard, and Robbin. It appears that William Jessop was negotiating the transfer on behalf of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting. Surry County Register of Deeds, “Index of Slaves in Surry County,” Surry County Government, \url{http://www.co.surry.nc.us/Departments/RegisterOfDeeds/slaeindex.htm} (accessed Sep. 6, 2012).


\(^{45}\) In 1833 Surry County slaveholders transferred Billy, Michael, and Rachel to the “Yearly Meeting of the friends Society of NC.” Surry County Register of Deeds, “Index of Slaves in Surry County,” Surry County Government, \url{http://www.co.surry.nc.us/Departments/RegisterOfDeeds/slaeindex.htm} (accessed Sep. 6, 2012).
in nature, or perhaps more accurately, organizations that lacked official church sponsorship. In 1814 East Tennessee Quaker and noted abolitionist Charles Osborn began organizing the “Tennessee Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves.” The following year Osborn and fellow Quakers developed a constitution which supported gradual emancipation and prohibited members from showing political support for proslavery officials. In February 1815 Quakers and possibly other emancipationists from the hill country of Tennessee met at the Lost Creek Meeting House in Jefferson County for the society’s first meeting. Soon after, antislavery Appalachians established local chapters in counties such as Cocke, Greene, Knox, Sullivan, and Washington in eastern Tennessee. For over twenty years the Manumission Society of Tennessee held annual conventions at Quaker meeting houses around the region. Yet Quaker emancipationists in Tennessee were not insular. The leadership engaged with the larger religious community, actively seeking membership and support from local evangelicals. Despite internal disagreements over the society’s long-term goals, membership remained steady and perhaps increased in the 1820s. The Manumission Society of Tennessee claimed twenty local chapters and approximately six hundred members throughout the eastern part of the state before it too dwindled in the period immediately following the Nat Turner Rebellion.

At the same time, Quakers also spearheaded manumission efforts in North Carolina that were interdenominational in nature. Following his work in Tennessee, Charles Osborn helped

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47 Ibid.
49 The internal disputes within the Tennessee Manumission Society were nearly identical to those that erupting around the same time in the North Carolina Manumission Society. See the discussion below.
organize a few scattered emancipationist clubs in North Carolina into a statewide society.\textsuperscript{51} The North Carolina Manumission Society held its first meeting in 1816 near New Garden, a Quaker community in the state’s western Piedmont. Soon after, other Quaker communities in the region began hosting local chapters.\textsuperscript{52} Eventually, approximately forty subgroups were active in and around counties in the North Carolina Piedmont where Quakers were numerous.\textsuperscript{53} The Quaker influence on antislavery sentiment in the region appears to have maintained its momentum in the years following the Manumission Society’s inception. In 1826 a Quaker newspaper published in East Tennessee reported that three hundred emancipationists from the North Carolina foothills held an antislavery meeting along the banks of the Yadkin River. Interestingly, the \textit{Genius of Universal Emancipation} noted that none of the participants belonged to the Society of Friends.\textsuperscript{54} Yet it is significant to note that the Yadkin River weaves through the westernmost reaches of North Carolina’s Quaker country. Therefore, the probability is high that local Quaker activism influenced non-Quaker manumissionists to organize.

Manumission Society members, Quakers and non-Quakers alike, initially united under a platform of gradual emancipation. But minutes from a meeting held in Randolph County indicate that internal disagreements over the appropriate course for the society splintered the organization into opposing camps. On one side, Quakers and likeminded emancipationists favored a path to freedom similar to the one outlined by the North Carolina Yearly Meeting. Beyond striving toward eventual abolition, in the meantime they espoused a relatively radical plan to help former slaves establish new lives in free states. They even proposed that the

\textsuperscript{52} Fernando Gale Cartland, \textit{Southern Heroes: Or, the Friends in War Time} (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895), 50-51.
\textsuperscript{53} Counties where local chapters of the North Carolina Manumission Society existed include, but are likely not limited to, Chatham, Davidson, Forsyth, Guilford, Orange, and Randolph. Digges & Connor, \textit{History of North Carolina}, Vol. II, 210.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 212.
Manumission Society update its name to the “Emancipation Society.”\textsuperscript{55} Emancipationist leader Levi Coffin recalled that a local attorney named Moses delivered “a strong abolition speech” of such conviction that it “would not have been allowed a few years later.”\textsuperscript{56} In contrast, a more conservative faction within the organization favored the redirection of all blacks—including those already free—to Liberia. Suggesting a name change to the “Manumission and Colonization Society” they opted that emancipation should be contingent on an agreement that all freed slaves must submit to deportation to Africa.\textsuperscript{57} Coffin remembered that this proposal “produced a sharp debate” among the members of the club.\textsuperscript{58}

Quaker manumissionists in the Upper South were divided over whether or not to support colonization. Emancipationists around Goose Creek, a Quaker stronghold in Loudoun County, Virginia, supported an effort to settle ex-slaves outside of the country. In 1824, “sundry citizens,” likely including, if not led by, local Quakers, organized the Manumission and Emigration Society of Loudoun, and included advocating colonization as a top priority in their founding constitution.\textsuperscript{59} In contrast, North Carolina Quakers preferred an alternate course, but they did not oppose colonization outright. In the 1820s the central office of the North Carolina Manumission Society deferred to local branches as to whether “emigration to Liberia [should] be encouraged.” The branches collectively replied that they would not mandate colonization against anyone’s will.\textsuperscript{60} According to Coffin, local Quakers and their supporters “had no objection to free negroes going to Africa of their own will;” however “to compel them to go as a
condition of freedom was a movement to which we were conscientiously opposed and against 
which we strongly contended.” Instead, they felt that manumitted slaves should have a say in 
the matter. In the mid 1820s Quaker emancipationists posed the question of colonization to the 
six hundred slaves held by the North Carolina Yearly Meeting. The results were split. 
Approximately half wanted to stay in the United States, preferring “to either ‘go west’ or ‘stay at 
home.’” But because the other half expressed interest in starting anew in Liberia, in 1826 
North Carolina Friends financed and organized several voyages, at least two destined for Liberia 
and one to Haiti.

Though Quakers in the upcountry demonstrated their flexibility on colonization, tensions 
within the North Carolina Manumission Society persisted. Relocation to Africa was never at the 
top of the agenda for Quaker emancipationists in the upcountry. Their foremost goal remained 
building a slow road to abolition. A commitment to helping ex-slaves transition from slavery to 
freedom within the United States followed closely behind. Therefore, plagued by internal 
disagreements, the first incarnation of the North Carolina Manumission Society eventually 
folded in 1823. The following year Quakers, north and south, worked together to reestablish the 
North Carolina Manumission Society under an agenda that would consider various paths to 
freedom, and also promote education initiatives for Southern blacks. Quaker led, but 
interdenominational in composition, by 1826 the society claimed three thousand members and 
boasted a diverse religious makeup. Yet post-Nat Turner legislation forced the newly redefined 
Manumission Society to close its doors as well.

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61 Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 75. 
62 Cartland, Southern Heroes, 50-51. 
64 Ibid. 
65 Ibid.
Prior to the 1830s some Southerners embraced gradual emancipation as an economic necessity; however, manumission-era Quakers interpreted antislavery activism as “holy work” that should be evangelized.\(^66\) In 1825 the leadership of the Manumission Society of Tennessee urged the wider community to undertake “those duties that God requires of you. . . . Mix with your neighbors, and in the spirit of meekness and wisdom, impress on them the justice of your cause . . . against this growing evil.”\(^67\) East Tennessee Quakers expressed a Providential worldview that championed human agency against injustice as part of Divine will. More directly, Southern Quakers viewed antislavery activism as a Christian responsibility. Action rather than “good wishes,” they insisted, won the day. While God had willed the Israelites to be delivered from bondage under Pharaoh, they asserted that human efforts “under God” made the escape from slavery in Egypt possible. Tennessee emancipationists warned that “God is just” and that a day of national judgment loomed. Therefore, white Southerners had the ability to affect the Almighty’s ruling. Heeding their responsibility to God would lead to future blessings, likely on earth, but certainly in Heaven. But continued apathy regarding slavery would undoubtedly lead to “retribution.”\(^68\)

North Carolina Quakers expressed parallel sentiments concerning their Providential role and the urgency of proselytizing the gospel of gradual emancipation. Religiously and morally opposed to human bondage, Guilford County Quaker William Swaim became active in the North Carolina Manumission Society where he served, for some time at least, as secretary. Swaim primarily gained recognition, however, as the editor and publisher of the *Greensborough Patriot*

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\(^{68}\) Ibid.
between 1827 and 1835. Located in the heart of Quaker country, the newspaper circulated throughout parts of the upcountry and beyond. At a time when North Carolina newspapers, such as the *Raleigh Register*, refused to touch antislavery editorials, Swaim transformed the *Greensborough Patriot* into the leading voice for the antislavery cause in the state. 69 Dedicated to social reform, the tagline for Swaim’s periodical read “The Ignorant and Degraded of Every Nation or Clime Must be Enlightened Before Our Earth Can Have Honor in the Universe.” 70

While Swaim frequently used the *Greensborough Patriot* to attack the ethics of slavery, an antislavery pamphlet that he published in 1830 sums up the religious argument that he and fellow Quaker activists espoused. Without alluding to an economic thesis, “An Address to the People of North Carolina on the Evils of Slavery,” makes clear that upcountry Quakers, and likely others with whom they cooperated, believed securing emancipation to be a responsibility to God and their fellow man. Drafted by members of the North Carolina Manumission Society under the alias “the friends of LIBERTY AND EQUALITY,” the essay makes a moral and religious case against slavery as being “radically evil” and “antichristian.” 71 Rejecting any religious claim favoring slavery as blasphemy, the writers charged that slavery “is contrary to the plain and simple maxims of the Christian Revelation. . . . a system fraught [sic] with so much injustice and attended with so many pernicious consequences, cannot possibly be consistent with the simple and disinterested truths of the religion of Christ.” 72 Furthermore, a resolution passed by the North Carolina Manumission Society at its final meeting in 1834 indicates how religiously imperative upcountry Quakers understood their antislavery work to be. Interpreting their

70 Editions of the *Greensborough Patriot* are available online through Walter Clinton Jackson Library, Digital Collections, Greensboro Historical Newspapers, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, http://libcdn1.uncg.edu/cdm/search/collection/GSOPatriot
72 Ibid., 6, 58-59.
activism as a responsibility to God, Benjamin Swaim, the President of the Manumission Society and cousin of William Swaim, urged his associates to use “expedient means” to stoke the antislavery fire because “this Institution has not yet achieved the whole object which Providence had designed for it.”

Though the manumission-era was quickly waning, antislavery Quakers rooted in the upcountry heeded Swaim’s call to action.

Ties of kin and community linked upcountry Quakers to one another, as well as to their brethren beyond the region. As relatively recent transplants to the Tennessee hills, some, if not most, East Tennessee Friends came from Piedmont North Carolina, and possibly Virginia, where they would have still claimed direct roots. This included Charles Osborn who was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, but relocated with his parents to eastern Tennessee in 1794 when he was nineteen years of age. Osborne’s work in establishing the North Carolina Manumission Society in the county of his birth makes clear that he maintained close ties with his home community. Further evidence of interstate cooperation indicates that North Carolina and Tennessee Quakers were in correspondence during the 1810s and 1820s. East Tennesseans Elihu Embree and James Jones, both “active members of the Society of Friends,” attended manumission meetings in North Carolina as delegates from Tennessee. Embree is of particular note. A native Tennessean and former slave owner, he eventually embraced the cause of gradual emancipation with such fervor that he founded and published two antislavery newspapers. Embree’s influence reached far and near through The Manumission Intelligencer and particularly The Emancipator, published in 1819 and 1820 respectively. At the time of his death in October

75 Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 74.
1820, *The Emancipator* circulated throughout the nation and had a subscription list of approximately two thousand.\(^7^6\)

Upcountry Quakers also corresponded with their brethren in the North. In the early 1820s East Tennessee emancipationists invited Benjamin Lundy, a New Jersey-born Quaker and noted antislavery advocate, to carry on Embree’s legacy via his printing press. Lundy accepted and relocated to Greenville in 1822 where he continued to publish an antislavery newspaper entitled the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.\(^7^7\) In East Tennessee Lundy helped lead the regional push for gradual emancipation and served as the president of the Greenville branch of the Tennessee Manumission Society. But even after Lundy’s departure from the state around 1823, Tennessee Quakers and other hill country emancipationists continued to advocate for manumission as they had before his arrival.

Marked opposition to slavery had become a cornerstone of the Southern Quaker church by the antebellum period. Following decades of reform initiatives—both within their denominational ranks, as well as the secular world beyond—most upcountry Quakers agreed that holding humans in bondage countered the teachings of Jesus and that complicity with the institution was fundamentally sinful. American Quakers, north and south, moved forward from a religious tradition of extending “spiritual equality” to the earthly realm that dated back to the movement’s founders. In the process, they transformed longstanding socioreligious arguments, particularly George Fox’s and Margaret Fell’s call for gender equality within the church, into a universal appeal against the Biblical legitimacy of slavery and for the emancipation of fellow

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\(^7^7\) In the 1820s Benjamin Lundy shifted between Jonesboro, Tennessee, Missouri, and Ohio. In 1822 he began publication of an antislavery newspaper entitled *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Lundy’s position on slavery seems to have evolved over time from that of an emancipationist to abolitionist.
children of God. Proslavery whites may have agreed that blacks and whites were spiritual equals, but most contended that God would sort that out in the world to come. This pronouncement would only intensify in the 1830s as antagonism between the antislavery and proslavery camps started to mount.

Proslavery whites may have frowned on Quakers’ zealous approach to reform during the manumission era. However, it was upcountry Quakers’ ongoing commitment to antislavery that primarily framed their dissent from the Southern establishment in the years between Nat Turner’s insurrection in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831 and the opening of the Civil War in 1861. Viewed in this light, Quakers maintained a religious opposition to slavery that was on par with Anabaptists’ antislavery sentiments. Yet, Quaker activism set Friends apart from Dunkards and Mennonites who strived primarily toward individual perfection and the purity of their immediate religious community. Instead, Quakerism espoused a Christian commitment to confront injustice and improve God’s kingdom on earth. In relation, Quakers interpreted their socioreligious work as an essential element of the design of Providence. Southern Quakers’ efforts to reach outside of their own religious communities made a difference. The willingness of Friends to engage the world profoundly influenced the socioreligious development of upcountry vicinities within proximity to Quaker communities.

**Folk Protestantism**

Denominational diversity in the Upper South offered religious alternatives and nurtured dissent from the Southern establishment. By the antebellum era, religious plurality and choice distinguished much of the Upper South, especially the upcountry, from the greater South which was becoming increasingly uniform, at least religiously. Outside of the upcountry, most Southerners were, in effect, eschewing denomination and instead mobilizing in one of two
primary religious camps: white evangelicalism or black evangelicalism. Without a doubt, the racial divide was apparent in the upland South as well. However, this binary framework disregards the increasing complexity of the Upper South’s religious atmosphere. The precedent of religious diversity set early on, mixed with interdenominational cooperation, socioeconomic factors, and disaffection with the Southern Evangelical mainstream, allowed local forms of folk Protestantism to take shape.

As scholars have shown, interdenominational cooperation emerged as a primary trait of Southern evangelical religion in the early nineteenth century. As John Boles and Donald Mathews have argued, Southern ministers often set denominational differences aside and united in order to fulfill their primary mission which was to save souls. Though hill country religion does not fit squarely into Mathews’s uniform evangelical framework, religious plurality did not preclude the region’s Protestants from coming together. Upcountry residents regularly reached across denominational boundaries in their social and religious lives. Interdenominationalism thrived in the region, albeit in a regionally unique fashion. Religious diversity allowed a distinctive form of upcountry interdenominationalism to develop that facilitated a socioreligious exchange unavailable in the greater South.

Anabaptist participation added to the distinctive nature of interdenominationalism in the upland South. Because Anabaptists were somewhat insular, their outreach proved more limited and less influential than Quakers who were committed advocates of social reform. Still, Anabaptist doctrine did not preclude Dunkards and Mennonites from associating with non-Anabaptist neighbors in social and religious activities. Shenandoah Valley Anabaptists, such as Dunkard minister John Kline, at times engaged with the surrounding religious community and

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shared Anabaptist principles with willing listeners and congregations. Though Kline and other Anabaptists were not aggressive evangelists, interfaith cooperation allowed some Anabaptists and non-Anabaptists to find common ground as fellow Protestants.

In the antebellum era, Dunkards and evangelicals in the Shenandoah Valley shared religious spaces, and at times worshiped together. Dunkards occasionally held their services in Methodist meetinghouses, as well as Baptist churches, albeit more infrequently. In addition, in the 1840s and 1850s, John Kline, a Dunkard elder from Rockingham County, Virginia, traveled throughout the Shenandoah Valley and surrounding hills, regularly preaching to local congregations, Methodists in particular. Kline also developed relationships with Methodist clergy in the region, and enjoyed attending Methodist services. In 1853 he went to “a Methodist quarterly meeting” where he observed, but seemingly did not participate in, the Methodist Love Feast and Holy Communion. Elder Kline relied on non-Anabaptists for accommodations as he traveled the Virginia hill country, preaching and performing baptisms. One April around 1850, Kline and a fellow Dunkard traveler “stayed all night at the widow Peggy Dasher's. . . . a member of the Methodist denomination, and a very kind and hospitable woman” whom they described as a true Christian. Finding common ground in their faith, the Dunkard elders in cooperation with Dasher and her sons agreed to hold “family worship in her house.”

Thus, Anabaptists may have been “outsiders” in the Southern upcountry, but they were not outcasts. Anabaptists, perhaps Dunkards in particular, mixed with other Protestants in religious atmospheres, formed social networks outside of their immediate religious communities,

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79 For instance, Elder John Kline frequently preached in Methodist churches. See Diary of John Kline, September 28, July 4, October 6, October 18, and June 11, approx. 1850 (unfortunately the years in Kline’s diary are often difficult to discern), in Funk, ed., *Life and Labors of Elder John Kline*, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16711/16711-h/16711-h.htm (accessed August 20, 2013).
80 Kline and other Dunkers “had night meeting in the Baptist meetinghouse near by.” Diary of John Kline, September 21, 1850, in Ibid.
81 Diary of John Kline, July 3, approx. 1850, in Ibid.
82 Diary of John Kline, April 22, approx. 1850, in Ibid.
and became intimately acquainted with members of other Protestant traditions. Yet, their presence in the upcountry was significant in its own right. It signified to others that religious options existed outside of the Evangelical establishment. Still, because they were not inclined toward social activism, Anabaptist radicalism proved less influential than Quakerism.

Quakers and Quakerism proved particularly influential in parts of the upcountry. Moving forward in their religious mission to confront the injustices of the world, Friends interacted with, and participated in, the larger community. Cooperation between Quakers and non-Quakers in the uplands was not a nineteenth century phenomenon. Instead, local residents maintained a tradition of interfaith cooperation in the region that extended back generations. For instance, in the 1760s, Quaker Herman Husband and Separate Baptist Jubal Stearns led a coalition of Friends, German Protestants, and various evangelicals in the North Carolina backcountry in a six-year-long protest against economic and political policies that disadvantaged the state’s western settlers while favoring the eastern elite. Though the “Regulators” expressed secular grievances, they shared an “antiauthoritarian” spirit grounded in their interpretation of Protestant religion. Despite denominational differences, religious similarities glued the coalition together and gave the Regulator movement meaning. This interdenominational tradition continued into the early nineteenth century, and was often Quaker-led. At the outset of the manumission era, for example, Quaker leaders from North Carolina and Tennessee appealed to local evangelicals to join in the antislavery crusade. The petition proved successful; Methodists and Presbyterians, probably others as well, heeded the call. Importantly, this regionally distinctive brand of upcountry interdenominationalism, that included a diverse assortment of Quakers, evangelicals,

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84 NCpedia, s.v. “Manumission Societies,” by Kirkman and Norris.
and other Protestants, had become entrenched in portions of the upcountry region where it would remain influential in the antebellum era.

The Quaker influence was not restricted to the meeting house, brush arbor, or other designated worship locations. In North Carolina’s central and western Piedmont, Quakers and non-Quakers lived among one another, regularly interacting in home, work, and public spaces. They contributed to the same community, intermarried, and raised children together. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Speers, a Methodist family in North Carolina’s Yadkin Valley, had intermarried with Quakers for generations.85 Similarly, in Guilford County, Elizabeth Linthicum, “a true and zelous Methodist of the old Wesley Stamp” married Quaker John Wilson.86 Likewise, in 1835 Isham Cox and Lavina Brower married in Randolph County, North Carolina. Even though Cox was a Quaker and Brower a Methodist, they agreed “that it was the will of our Heavenly Father that we should become helpmeets to each other thro lifes uneven journey.” Seeing no need to compromise denomination, together they attended Cox’s Quaker meeting and Lavina’s Methodist church as often as possible.87

Quaker and non-Quaker neighbors also relied on one another for companionship and survival. Quaker Ann Benbow may have preached occasionally, but the greater community around her Yadkin County home relied on her skills as a midwife.88 Attending births throughout the region, Benbow undoubtedly became intimately familiar with her neighbors and their homes. Additionally, families in need of an extra laborer often “shared work” or hired a neighbor to help

85 Over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Speers intermarried with their Quaker neighbors including the Hinshaws, Hobsons, Vestals, and Normans. Allen Paul Speer, ed., From Banner Elk to Boonville. The Voices Trilogy: Part III (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 2010), xvii-xviii.
87 “A brief account of the life and travels of Isham Cox, Written by himself,” Isham Cox Papers, Hege Library, Friends Historical Collection, Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina, hereafter cited as FHC.
out in exchange for room and board. In April 1862 Quaker Enoch Coffin stayed with the Thomassons for three days. Together he and Basil “finished the new ground & pasture fences, split a few rails, some firewood, etc. etc. [before] Enoch left Friday morning.”89 Quaker and non-Quaker women shared work and social spaces as well. In February 1860, for instance, Mollie and Jane Thomasson attended “a quilting” at the home of the Coffins, a neighboring Quaker family.90

Cooperation between Quakers and others also took place in formal religious settings. Interdenominational church participation, especially in the North Carolina Piedmont, introduced non-Friends to Quaker ideals, radical for their time and place, including gender equality and antislavery. In 1844, Jennie Speer, a Yadkin Valley Methodist, went to “hear a couple of female Friends preach.” Reflecting on the meeting, Jennie hoped “the Lord [would] bless that denomination for they appear to be the only people who acknowledge the rights of women.”91 Never forsaking her devotion to Methodism, Jennie continued to attend Quaker meetings. Sitting amidst a packed house at the 1850 Yearly Meeting for North Carolina, Jennie opined that Quakers “live nearer the standard of the Bible than any other denomination.”92 Similarly, Basil and Mollie Thomasson, also devout Methodists, often attended a local Monthly Meetings where they encountered the Quakers’ liberal principles.93 At times they went with the Coffins, a

89 Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, April 26, 1862, in Escott, ed. North Carolina Yeoman, 326.
90 Ibid., 270.
92 Ibid., 57.
93 Basil A. Thomasson was particularly progressive regarding the status of women. The source of his ideas is not certain, but it is quite possible that interactions with the local Quaker community helped give them shape. In his diary entry of February 27, 1854, Basil A. Thomasson wrote that he “Had a regular chat to night, about woman’s work, etc. There are more slave in the U.S. than most of us are aware of. Freedom is a great thing, but woman cant be allowed to enjoy it; they are slaves to men & to fashion, but the time is coming when they will be free; may that time come quickly. Amen.” Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, February 27, 1854, in Escott, ed., North Carolina Yeoman, 29.
neighboring Quaker family with whom they often shared work.\textsuperscript{94} In July 1860, Basil attended a Quaker meeting where he “heard Ann Benbow preach” a message that he believed to be “very good advice.”\textsuperscript{95} Similarly, in July 1861, at the height of “war fever” in the Confederate States, Mollie willfully went to “the Quaker Church and heard one Silas Carter, from Ohio, preach. She says he preached loud and long.”\textsuperscript{96} Cooperation between Quakers and non-Quakers in North Carolina’s western Piedmont was observed by Reverend Adam Crooks, a Wesleyan Methodist minister from Indiana who visited the upcountry in 1847. Crooks additionally recognized that there was “much more anti-slavery sentiment in this part of North Carolina than I had supposed,” a pleasant surprise that he attributed to “the influence of the society of Friends.”\textsuperscript{97}

![Image of Friends Meeting House at New Garden]

Figure 5: Friends Meeting House at New Garden. North Carolina Quakers and likeminded community members, such as Methodist Jennie Speer, looked forward to the Yearly Meeting held annually at New Garden Meeting House in Guilford County. Watercolor by John Collins, 1869. Image courtesy of the FHC.


\textsuperscript{95} Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, July 8, 1860, in Escott, ed., \textit{North Carolina Yeoman}, 280.

\textsuperscript{96} Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, July 28, 1860, in Ibid., 282.

Through community participation and interdenominational cooperation, upcountry Protestants became aware of a variety of socioreligious viewpoints. Interaction with Quakers in particular, and Anabaptists on occasion, introduced local evangelicals and others to liberal principles largely unavailable—or at least less accessible—in the greater South. Though many white residents of the Upper South would never find common ground with Quakers or Anabaptists, others would. The Quaker opposition to slavery, for instance, proved influential in parts of the region during the antebellum era. However, the availability of religious alternatives impacted the upland South in another significant manner. Religious diversity set a standard, early on, informing locals that subscribing to the religious establishment was unnecessary. By the antebellum era, a lack of religious choice in the larger South had caused most of the region’s whites to unite behind an increasingly sectional and myopic brand of Southern Evangelicalism. However, religious plurality prevented this process from consuming the upcountry where locals continued to see religious options rather than restrictions. Of course, most upcountry residents, Baptists and Methodists for the most part, never joined Quaker, Anabaptist, Moravian or Lutheran congregations. More often dissenters remained loyal to their denominational tradition, but rejected the mainline institution. Significantly, dissent from the religious mainstream in the South was most apparent in parts of the upcountry within relative proximity to “other” Protestants, particularly Quakers.

At first glance, the denominational distribution of much of the Upper South hill country appears to mirror that of the greater South. Quakers, Anabaptists, and others such as Moravians could be locally strong. Yet, these denominations were always in the minority in the upcountry as a whole. Instead, Baptist and Methodist churches dominated. This, in effect, makes it appear as if the Southern Orthodoxy reigned supreme, a few fringe sects excepted. Without a doubt, a
number of Baptist and Methodist churches in the upland South fit neatly within the mainline framework. Others, however, did not. During the first half of the nineteenth century, hill country evangelicals who were disenchanted by the religious establishment separated themselves from their mainline church conferences. Preferring to worship according to their own principles and dictates, upcountry Baptists and Methodists began forming independent congregations and local conferences that suited their own spiritual and social interests. Others reluctantly plugged along within the mainline structure. Still, they resisted absorption into the Southern Orthodoxy, and continued to find meaning in evangelical traditions that were quickly becoming outdated across much of the South. Rather than acquiescing to denominational transformations in which they disagree, these evangelical dissenters practiced forms of “folk religion” often grounded in a desire to maintain a local church government and a lay clergy. But perhaps most significant, folk Protestants respected religious tradition and resented policies that compromised what the denominational founders had stood for. Though dissimilar in doctrine and practice, as a whole, folk Protestants rejected the Southern Evangelical establishment and added to their religious complexity already in place in the Southern upcountry.

Upcountry Protestants began dissenting from mainline denominations in earnest in the 1820s and 1830s, approximately the time that the dominant religious establishments were coming of age. Southern religion as a whole was in a state of transition at this time. Hoping to further their mission to save souls, the Baptists and Methodist establishments were pushing to move from a position of “alienation to influence” within society. In the process both denominations became more institutionalized. Attempting to reach a broader public, the churches pushed a variety of “modern” initiatives including sponsoring mission trips, opening

99 Donald Mathews first analyzed the shift from “alienation to influence” in Religion in the Old South. For more recent interpretations of the concept see Heyrman, Southern Cross; Schweiger, The Gospel Working Up.
publishing houses, and founding universities. At the same time, the denominations worked to make the church structures more centralized and increasingly promoted the use of a professional, seminary trained clergy. In response, hill country Protestants charged that mainline leaders were becoming more interested in gaining personal power than in building the Kingdom of God.

Folk Protestants were resistant to religious change, but they were not anti-modern or socially unprogressive. In other words, religious conservatism did not translate into social conservatism. In reality, folk Protestants who continued to honor the evangelical principles forwarded by John Wesley and Jubal Stearns espoused a socioreligious order that was more radical and egalitarian than that advocated by the increasingly myopic mainline clergy. As the denominational establishments became more centralized and top-down during the first half of the early nineteenth century, folk Protestants charged that mainliners were losing sight of the “true” religion espoused by denominational pioneers in the revivals of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. In response, folk Protestants attempted to hold fast to the “old time” or “primitive” evangelicalism practiced by their parents and grandparents. The process began in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, but later proliferated as debates over slavery caused national church conferences to divide.

Baptists appear to be the first to question transformations which challenged tradition, especially their reliance on homegrown leadership and a lay ministry consisting of local elders. Believing that the Spirit alone called elders to profess God’s word, upcountry Baptists regarded seminaries, Sunday schools, and mission trips as human institutions that enabled false prophets to dilute the word of God. In reaction, starting in the 1820s dissatisfied upcountry Baptists disassociated with the mainline denomination. North Carolina Baptists initiated the process and

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likeminded Baptists in the hill country of Virginia and Tennessee followed suit. By mid-century, the majority of upcountry “Old School” Baptists labeled themselves as Primitive Baptists, though some appear to have identified as Old Regular Baptists. By the late antebellum period, Primitive Baptist Associations such as Fisher River Association, Mountain District Association, and Mayo Association dotted much of the upcountry, and appear to have represented the primary form of Baptist religion practiced in much of the upcountry.

Old Time Baptists were congregational in nature. Entirely unaffiliated with the primary Baptist establishment, Old Time Baptist Churches were independent bodies that governed themselves. As local organizations, most relied on a lay ministry called to preach by God, rather than groomed to preach in seminary. Most Old Time Baptists were Calvinist in theology, albeit some were more hard-line than others. Most Old Time Baptists, such as Primitives and Old Regulars, maintained a predestinarian outlook including a belief that God’s elect alone would be saved. They consequently opposed missionary efforts and refused to fellowship with those who supported these outreach initiatives. In fact, disagreements over mission work drove another wedge between Old Schoolers, causing some to branch off and form equally autonomous

[^1]: Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 128.
[^2]: The relationship between Primitives and Old Regulars in the early 19th century upcountry is unclear. They certainly became two distinctive denominations in time, but evidence suggests that they drew no lines between themselves in the antebellum era. For instance, Robert W. Hill of Stokes County, North Carolina referred to himself in an 1863 letter as “a minister of the Gospel of the Old Regular Baptist Church.” R. W. Hill [Germanton] to Governor Vance, between July 28-31, 1863, Governor Zebulon Baird Vance Papers, North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, hereafter referred to as NCDAH. However, church association minutes indicate that Hill was an elder in the Clear Springs Primitive Baptist Church which was part of the Mayo Primitive Baptist Association. Jesse A. Ashburn, *History of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association, 1832-1904* (Laurel Fork, VA: F.P. Branscome, 1905); and *Minutes of the Mayo Baptist Association Held at Russell Creek Church, Patrick County, VA., Commencing May 17th, 1862. And At Matrimony Church, Rockingham County, N.C., Commencing October 19th, 1862* (Winston, N.C.: Printed at the “Sentinel” Office, 1863).
[^3]: Chester Raymond Young, “Primitive Baptists,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, 107-108. In 1867, for instance, *Branson’s North Carolina Business Directory* reported that Surry County had ten Baptist churches. Of these, nine were Primitive Baptist churches; one was a Missionary Baptist church. The other ten churches in the county were Methodist. *Branson’s North Carolina Business Directory for 1867-8, Containing Facts, Figures, Names, and Locations* (Raleigh: Branson & Jones, Publishers, 1868), 102.
Missionary Baptist churches in the upcountry. Yet these were not the only disputes to arise over time. Primitive Baptist congregations occasionally divided over seemingly minor nuances. Importantly, however, Old Time Baptists were neither reclusive nor isolated. Though detached from the mainline religious structure, Primitive Baptist and Missionary Baptist churches alike regularly cooperated with likeminded congregations in nearby counties. Regional church associations crossed state boundaries and formed networks that linked upcountry Old Time Baptists together.

Methodists in the Southern uplands also began dissenting from the mainline church in the first half of the nineteenth century. Though discontent with status quo Methodism in the South, tradition-minded Methodists were not in consensus on how to best honor the tradition of John and Charles Wesley. Like Baptists, they were not a uniform lot; their reasons for absconding from the mainline were multifaceted. For example, the central leadership’s increasing emphasis on professionalization disenchanted those who felt that one did not need to be ordained in order to enter the ministry. Like Old School Baptists, Methodist dissenters often charged that preaching was a Divine call, not a vocation. This contingent often preferred a church structure in which lay members had a greater voice. Furthermore, the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 along sectional lines angered others who urged that secession from the national conference was tantamount to treason against God. This brought a debate over the morality of slavery to light within the Southern church, and encouraged a spirit of dissent to emerge within disaffected upcountry Methodists. Many remained, albeit reluctantly, within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A religious opposition to slavery, however, forced congregations

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surrounding Quaker strongholds in Piedmont North Carolina to refuse association with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Methodists as a whole were theologically and organizationally different from Primitive and other Old School Baptists. In contrast to the predestinarianism advocated by Baptists, Methodists were committed to the doctrine of Arminianism, which held that individuals, through their own free will, had the ability to seek salvation. Therefore, unlike Baptists, modern initiatives such as mission trips and Sunday schools hardly troubled Methodists. In addition, Methodists were not congregational in structure. With the exception of a few congregations, most Methodists churches that dissented from the Methodist Episcopal Church, and later the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, sought affiliations with alternative Methodist conferences that better served their needs and consciences. Therefore, Methodists dissenters, for the most part, did not push for congregational independence. But they certainly made clear that they, not the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, would define Methodism as they saw fit, command their own course, and decide with whom they would fellowship.

The first major fissure in Southern Methodism in the nineteenth century started in the 1820s when dissatisfied upcountry Methodists left the Methodist Episcopal Church to align with the newly organized Methodist Protestant Church, based in Baltimore. Though theologically similar to the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church supported the rights of an unordained ministry and emphasized democracy in church matters. Therefore, Methodist “seceders” or “reformers” acted in direct response to new professional standards that the General Conference had recently established. In 1849, Reverend John Paris, a minister in the Methodist Protestant Church in North Carolina, remembered that disaffection developed over a

\[\text{Reference: Elmer T. Clark, } Methodism in Western North Carolina (Nashville, Parthenon Press, 1966), 68-69.\]
\[\text{Reference: Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., “Methodist Protestant Church,” } The Encyclopedia of Religion in the South, 500-501\]

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new charter that required a “license to preach.” The central church additionally established measures that restricted the autonomy of local branches and left “local preachers as well as the laity . . . without any voice whatever either in the Annual or General Conferences.”  

Disenchanted, whole congregations in parts of the North Carolina Piedmont defected to the Methodist Protestant Church. Methodists in the Quaker stronghold of Guilford County, led the charge in the western portion of the state. A “spirit of hostility” emerged between Methodist Protestants and Methodist Episcopalians in the area, and the leadership of the mainline “Guilford Circuit” labeled those who absconded to the new denomination as “radicals.”

Following the success in Guilford County, congregations formed in neighboring counties, as well as in the hill country of Tennessee and Virginia. While the strength of the Protestant Methodist Church never neared that of Methodist Episcopal Church even in the upcountry, the transition exposed significant fissures then developing within Southern Methodism and nourished a spirit of dissent in parts of the upcountry.

Denominational disputes that were national in scope were also experienced within the South. In particular, the debate that emerged in the 1840s within the Methodist General Conference over the rights of bishops to hold slaves was not purely sectional. The “Plan of Separation,” which divided the Methodist Episcopal Church into independent northern and southern wings in 1844, irritated religious tensions within the South, and ultimately, it further splintered Methodism in the region. The reluctance of upcountry Methodist leaders to secede

109 According to a church historian, at “Whitaker’s Chapel in Halifax County, Union in Granville County, Liberty in Randolph, [and] Moriah, Bethel, and Flat Rock in Guilford, practically the whole membership of the original body went into the new organization.” Clark, Methodism in Western North Carolina, 69.
110 Paris, History of the Methodist Protestant Church, 290.
111 Ibid., 294.
112 Ibid., 298-299.
from the Methodist Episcopal Church and align with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South makes clear that Southern Methodists as a whole, even mainliners, did not embrace the sectional conference.

Anxieties over the “Plan of Separation” and a slaveholding clergy were particularly apparent in the Holston Conference, a regional sub-conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church—later the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—that covered eastern Tennessee, much of southwestern Virginia, and some of western North Carolina. Upon hearing of the General Conference’s decision to divide, East Tennessee minister George Ekin wrote to his grandson and insisted that “I belong to the M. E. Church. I intend to stick to the old ship as long as I live.” In October 1844 Methodist leaders from across Holston met in Buncombe County, North Carolina and unanimously resolved that they were “unprepared to see the Church ‘torn asunder without one more effort to bind up her bleeding wounds.’” In a last ditch effort they appealed to the Northern and Southern Conferences to agree to a new convention to “devise a plan of compromise.” Yet when negotiation failed, the Holston Conference aligned with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1845.

Holston Methodists, clergy and lay members alike, however, were bitterly divided over the conference’s course. The outcome particularly troubled Tennessean George Ekin, North Carolinian Eli Hutsell, and Virginian James St. Clair, Holston Methodists leaders who corresponded with one another about opportunities for denominational reconciliation in the wake of the Plan of Separation. If nothing else, they at least hoped to find a way to realign their own congregations with the Methodist Episcopal Church. St. Clair, a layman from Wytheville, Virginia, declared that he and his family were “determined to stay in the old ship till she lands on

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113 Isaac Patton Martin, Methodism in Holston (Knoxville: The Methodist Historical Society, 1945), 64.
114 Ibid., 65.
115 Ibid., 64.
the other shore.” Going further, he claimed to know “not one here of the lay or official members
who is willing to change his position except Brother James C. Walker.” Likewise, St. Claire
reported that “Brother Absalom Fisher has taken the voice of several societies on Cripple Creek,
and they are unanimous for staying as they always were.” Despite their hopes, Methodist
dissenters in Holston were unable to remain with “the old ship.” In the years that followed,
Holston clergy who opposed separation entertained hopes of national reconciliation between the
Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Yet they hoped in vain.
Ten years later, in July 1855, Reverend Eli Hustell of Asheville, North Carolina informed
George Ekin that he still rejected the “Southern organization” and had always claimed
“membership in the old Church.” Resentment within Holston would persist for decades.

Figure 6: The Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the 1840s,
Holston aligned with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

As the cases of Old Time Baptists, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Holston
Conference indicate, hill country folk Protestantism largely centered on an appreciation for

117 Ibid., 436.
118 Ibid., 434.
religious tradition. Those who dissented from the mainline were not unprogressive. In fact, as will be analyzed in more detail in the following chapter, they could be socially progressive, albeit some more than others. But as a collective, they distrusted mainline institutions that they believed were straying from the founders’ original message and intent. Perhaps, equally insufferable, the arising Southern Orthodoxy appeared increasingly bent on catering to an elite class in which many upcountry residents felt no affinity. This is not to imply that a sense of outright class-based animosity was the order of the day in the Upper South. Sources including postwar veterans’ interviews suggest that it was more complicated than that. While some upcountry residents such as Hinton Rowan Helper from Davie County, North Carolina loathed the Southern slaveocracy, others such as George Adair from Giles County, Tennessee conceded that the relationship between the classes was “friendly.”\textsuperscript{119} Others such as Joab Helton, also from Grainger County, Tennessee, found the truth somewhere in between, holding that “some [slaveholders] were friendly,” while others were “not very friendly.”\textsuperscript{120} Yet even if class relationships were not fully antagonistic, a class consciousness was certainly present in the upcountry that when intermingled with local religious diversity could encourage dissent.

No single profile characterizes folk Protestants as a whole; yet, non-elites, those individuals who were peripheral to the economic and political power structure in the South, appear to have been the most attracted to alternative forms of evangelical religion. Therefore, while religious diversity helped create an environment where dissent could flourish, class anxiety influenced the proliferation of folk Protestantism in the Southern uplands. Similar forces were at


play in the nineteenth century upcountry that were present in eighteenth century Virginia. As Rhys Isaacs’s explains, evangelical religion gave disenfranchised Virginians access to an alternative social order. By 1770 an “evangelical counterculture” had emerged in Virginia that stood in direct contrast to the dominant culture defined by genteel Virginians and reinforced by the Anglican Church.  

Similarly, a religious counterculture evolved in the upcountry in the nineteenth century that stood in opposition to a society ordered by Southern elites and increasingly supported by the Southern Orthodoxy. The counterculture consisted of a coalition of folk evangelicals, as well as Quakers, Anabaptists and Pietists, who resisted being incorporated into the Southern Evangelical establishment. Like in eighteenth century Virginia, the religious counterculture in the upcountry mostly appealed to the lower classes. In 1847, Dunkard Elder John Kline insisted that “the poor” were always willing to hear his message.

Daniel Worth, a Quaker turned Wesleyan Methodist minister, reported a similar observation. In 1859 he noted that North Carolinians who turned out to hear him preach were “almost all poor, many quite so.”

However, the writers never clearly defined “poor.” Rather than referring to a specific socioeconomic group, it is more likely that “poor” included an array of individuals outside of the dominant power structure, ranging from landless whites to yeomen of various degrees of wealth. For example, Basil Armstrong Thomasson a farmer residing in the Yadkin Valley of North Carolinian described himself as “poor.” But as a yeoman who valued education and was an occasional participant in the market, Thomasson was, perhaps more accurately, part of an


123 Daniel Worth [New Salem, N.C.] to Aaron Worth, January 23, 1859, Daniel Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, hereafter cited as the SHC.
unofficial middling class. He came from a landowning family, married into a landowning family, and eventually he and his wife, Mollie Bell, owned their own farm. They operated within a strong network of family and community that worked together to remain afloat. Though they rarely had spare money, it is likely that the Thomassons lived in relative comfort compared to the nearly twenty-five percent of their neighbors who were landless in 1860. It is likely that members of this twenty-five percent—most of which were farm hands and presumably struggling to obtain their own property—would fall into Daniel Worth’s “quite” poor category, while the Thomassons and other yeomen families in similar circumstances may just qualify as “poor.” Either way, the category was weakly defined; the “poor” varied by degrees.

Viewed in this light, the majority of upcountry whites could be described as “poor.” Landless whites and yeomen at different levels of wealth probably did not perceive of themselves as belonging to a cohesive socioeconomic group. While financial standing likely mattered, additional nuances such as education level, family associations, and reputation within the community would have also helped define class boundaries on the ground level. Yet despite marked differences, the “poor” would have also recognized common ground as non-elites. Those without land certainly would have been aware of the socioeconomic distance that separated them from the wealthy. But as Basil Thomasson’s diary indicates, landowning yeomen from “respectable” families could also define themselves in contrast to the power holding aristocracy. On the local level, members of a common geographic community would have been on familiar terms and would have had access to many of the same ideas. Social and religious exchange which crossed denominational boundaries would have allowed many of the local “poor” to emphasize their similarities as well. Importantly, work relationships would have also allowed yeomen and laborers to become intimately familiar. In reality, regardless of

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whether or not one owned land, residents of upcountry communities would have been reliant on the skills and labor of their neighbors. Community cooperation was crucial for survival.\(^\text{125}\)

Additionally, the distance between a farm laborer, tenant farmer, and yeoman was not always that dramatic. As historian Paul Escott points out, some of the farm laborers listed on the 1860 census in Andrew and Leah Thomassons’ neighborhood—Basil Thomasson’s parents immediate community—were sons of landowning families who would likely obtain land in the future. Basil Thomasson himself spent years as a laborer within his community. Of course, others would never gain land. Escott notes that approximately one-quarter to one-third of the households in the area surrounding the Thomassons’ homes in Iredell County and Yadkin County, North Carolina were renters without apparent associations to landowning families.\(^\text{126}\) A lack of documentation makes it difficult to project how yeomen families perceived of their neighbors who did not own land. But as laborers within a “poor” community where status was tenuous, it can be assumed that they were not marginalized due to their financial standing or inability to gain land. As a number of East Tennesseans professed in post-Civil War interviews, hill country residents generally gauged their neighbors by their work ethic or their “idleness.” The Tennesseans interviewed mostly agreed with Joel Acuff from Grainger County that agricultural work was “the most honorable way this [sic] was to make a living” prior to the war.\(^\text{127}\) But this did not draw a definitive line between those who worked their own land and those who were stuck working land owned by another. Acknowledging that “it was a hard task


for a young man to buy a farm” in the antebellum years, East Tennesseans appear to have defined respectability in contrast to “idleness.”  

In sum, folk Protestantism may have been the domain of the “poor,” but the makeup of this religious “counterculture,” to use Rhys Isaac’s description, was more complex than the word implies. More accurately, folk Protestantism belonged to a variety of upcountry residents who were tangential to the dominant power structure in the South. Though they were not a cohesive social unit, residing in tight-knit communities allowed them to locate common ground. Folk Protestants may have ranged from yeomen families of varying degrees of wealth, to tenant families on the verge of landownership, to laboring families whose future prospects seemed less certain. However, what matters most here is that folk Protestants collectively defined themselves in contrast to Southern elites, and their religion in contrast to the Southern Orthodoxy.

Protestantism in the Upper South, particularly the upcountry region, had become fully splintered by the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Religious “others” such as Quakers and a variety of German Protestants that added to the religious mix early on would remain active in the region for decades to come. So too would folk Protestants such as Primitive Baptists who only gained strength as the nineteenth century moved forward. Yet the splintering process was far from complete as disagreements over slavery would indicate in the years to come, starting in earnest after Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831 and steadily gaining momentum until the start of the Civil War in 1861.

Upcountry Protestants disagreed with the emerging Southern Orthodoxy on a variety of issues, including church governance and access to the ministry. However, Christians outside of the religious establishment—whether folk Protestants, Quakers or others—often disagreed with

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128 Ibid.
the mainline church’s increasingly proslavery agenda as well. As previously argued, Quakers and Anabaptists continued to honor a religious opposition to slavery at a time when Southern evangelicals were beginning to reconsider—before later completely reversing—their antislavery position. An ongoing dedication to antislavery is what, in part, defined Quaker and Anabaptist dissent in the early nineteenth century South and would remain important in the late antebellum period. But Protestants outside of these denomination traditions dissented from the mainstream regarding slavery as well. Surely the vast majority of upcountry residents were not, nor never strove to be, antislavery crusaders. Yet the aversion to slavery that some expressed in diaries and letters challenges the assumption that white Southern Protestants were of a single mind regarding slavery. Their religious reservations make clear that the Southern Evangelical clergy’s proslavery appeals were less than convincing, at times even for Southerners who remained loyal to their mainline institutions. Still, other Southerners could not commit in good faith to a church that was exhorting a proslavery gospel in which they were diametrically opposed. Just as they respected religious tradition in other matters, some upcountry whites held fast to old time forms of antislavery Protestantism that had disappeared in most of the South by 1830.
CHAPTER II

“I INTEND TO STICK TO THE OLD SHIP”:
RELIGIOUS DISSENT & SLAVERY

In 1857 North Carolina native Hinton Rowan Helper charged that Southern churches would not be washed of their “satanic piety” until they had been “thoroughly abolitionized.”¹ Helper’s passionate, and intentionally public, antislavery plea was certainly an exception to the rule in the post-Nat Turner South, where laws made challenging slavery not only unacceptable, but, in fact, a potentially dangerous affair. Nevertheless, Helper was one of many late antebellum-era Upper South whites who rejected the Southern Orthodoxy’s insistence that the institution of slavery was Divinely-ordained and morally just when administered by Christian masters and mistresses as, they alleged, God intended. Instead, Helper and other antislavery whites insisted that slavery stood in direct opposition to the most fundamental tenets of Christianity as revealed in Scripture and illuminated by the denominational pioneers. Unable to reach a consensus on slavery, Southern Protestantism continued to fissure, a process sparked by the formation of separate Northern and Southern church conferences in the 1840s. Ultimately opposition to slavery ran the gamut from active to passive, but some of the most fervent faith-based assaults on slavery developed in portions of the upcountry where Quakers and class-conscious folk Protestants lived and interacted.

Most upcountry whites who expressed their reservations over slavery were not as politically inclined as Helper, a self-described abolitionist. Importantly, however, regardless of

one’s degree of commitment to antislavery, whites from a variety of denominational and social backgrounds placed their opposition to slavery within a religious framework. Consequently, Protestants ranging from Quakers to Presbyterians often espoused similar religious-based rejections of slavery and the Southern establishment that sustained it. Furthermore, at the same time that ministers and politicians were debating slavery on the national stage, internal disputes over slavery were polarizing the South and causing Southern Protestantism to fragment even further. Late antebellum disputes over slavery, therefore, caused upcountry residents to carry on a tradition of socioreligious dissent. Regional religious diversity and a heritage of interdenominational cooperation, in turn, aided dissent and helped enable the proliferation of antislavery Protestantism in the upcountry.

Antislavery whites may have agreed that slavery was unchristian; however, their opposition to the institution did not spring from a single well. While religious devotion alone called some to action, secular anxieties proved more influential to others. Additionally, antislavery attitudes in the Upper South varied by degrees, and opinions on how slavery should be confronted were as diverse as the region’s religious atmosphere. While antislavery activism was present in the upcountry, perhaps most who harbored antislavery principles remained passive throughout the antebellum era. The reasons for inaction certainly varied, but the dangerous consequences of speaking out against slavery in the years following Nat Turner’s Rebellion undoubtedly hushed many.² Faithfully believing that Providence would ultimately intercede, they quietly opposed the institution and patiently awaited its demise. Yet, despite a lack of consensus on motivations and reactions, important commonalities existed among the region’s antislavery dissenters. Even when motivated by socioeconomic factors, Upper South

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² For a detailed discussion, see David B. Chesbrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 30-49.
residents regularly viewed slavery through a religious lens, often resting their antislavery case on similar religious themes. Despite differences in doctrine and mind, antislavery Southerners found common ground in interpretations of the Bible and Christian responsibility that stood in stark contrast to the proslavery gospel then resounding from mainline pulpits across the South.

Antislavery Protestantism stood at odds with the proslavery Southern Orthodoxy in place by 1830 and progressively growing stronger in the years that followed. This distinction was not always present. Though spawned from common seeds—not so much in the case of Quakers and Anabaptists, but certainly in the case of antislavery folk Protestants and the Southern Orthodoxy—Evangelical religion in the South splintered and travelled divergent paths following the opening of the Second Great Awakening. In flux since approximately the turn of the nineteenth century, the evolution of evangelicalism illustrates the fluidity of religion in the early nineteenth century South. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Southern clergy—largely Baptist and Methodist—led the antislavery charge, often supported by a local laity on a religious mission to eradicate the sin of slavery, within their own congregations if nothing else. Largely a product of nearly fifty years of evangelical revivals falling between the First and Second Great Awakenings in the South, the religious rebirth of the individual extended to many Southerners a new framework for ordering—or reordering—society as a whole. Imagining a world structured on “moral purity” rather than “worldly honor,” Evangelical preachers denounced the sin of slavery and espoused equality in Christ.³ In the process, Southern churches opened their doors to slaves, while simultaneously turning out slaveholders. However, hoping to expand their influence, within a relatively short span of time, many churches in the South began to side-step the slavery question. Rather than attacking slaveholders’

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³ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), 51
morality, some clergy fell quiet on the issue. Others turned in full support of the institution. Once criticizing slavery as sinful, many now pointed to slavery’s Biblical legitimacy. After 1830, antebellum Southern Evangelicals asserted that it was a moral institution which served to Christianize the slave population. After Nat Turner’s rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831, public denunciations of slavery virtually ceased in the South as Southern legislatures enacted new laws restricting activity that could endanger slavery and the status quo.

Despite antebellum laws that made challenging slavery dangerous, antislavery thought and some abolitionist activity continued in the Upper South, most notably in parts of the upcountry. Antislavery whites, however, were not wholly alike. While religious duty urged some to take action, socioeconomic realities caused others to oppose the institution. But even when class anxieties appear to be the primary factor guiding dissent, Upper South whites consistently fell back on religion to make a moral case against slavery. Though denominationally and socially diverse, antislavery dissenters put forth similar interpretations of Scripture and Christian duty that were in contrast with those espoused by the proslavery Southern establishment.

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4 David B. Chesbrough argues that antislavery preachers in the South either “kept their silence, moved to the North, or suffered various consequences for dissenting.” Chesbrough, Clergy Dissent in the Old South, xii.
5 Numerous historians have pointed out the Christian defense of slavery that Southern clergy used in the last three decades of the antebellum era. See for instance, Mathews, Religion in the Old South; Mark A. Noll, The Civil War as a Theological Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Mitchell Snay, The Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
Anabaptists & Quakers

*The Bible, in bidding us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, said nothing about color, and I should try to follow out the teachings of that good book.*

Moving forward into the 1830s and beyond, Upper South Anabaptists and Quakers continued to share in a faith-based rejection of slavery, crafted primarily on the grounds that slavery countered Christ’s message of love. Both groups exhibited a zealous dedication to a perception of Christian duty derived from Scripture; a version of Christian duty they deemed incompatible with slavery. Importantly, however, as in prior decades their individual interpretations of Christian responsibility encouraged Anabaptists and Quakers to respond to slavery in much different ways. Believing the world to be exceedingly corrupt, Anabaptists continued to retreat from secular society in order to focus on individual purity and the purity of their immediate religious community. Though morally opposed to the institution, Anabaptist passivity kept most upcountry Brethren and Mennonites from making overt antislavery appeals to those outside of their religious community. Quakers too acknowledged worldly sin, but chose to confront it. Unlike Virginia Anabaptists whose policy of separation from “the world” limited their influence, Upper South Quakers participated in the community—local, regional, and national—and pushed to transform it for the better. In the process, tenets of Upper South Quakerism crossed denominational boundaries and proved influential in parts of the upcountry.

Quaker opposition to slavery remained intact after the demise of the manumission era following Nat Turner’s Rebellion. Yet, upcountry Quakers reacted differently to the defeat they sensed as stricter state laws forced Southern manumission societies to fold and hopes for gradual

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emancipation dwindled. Aware that their struggle against slavery had come up short, some disaffected Friends lost their enthusiasm and removed to free states where they undoubtedly continued to oppose slavery, albeit passively and from a distance. However, other Quakers, in and from the upcountry, remained committed to antislavery reform. Still motivated by Christ’s two great commandments to “love the Lord thy God with all thy might” and to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” Quaker activists transformed their antislavery agenda as the antebellum period entered a new phase. Continuing to operate within a tradition of socioreligious dissent, they confronted slavery head-on, reminding Christians, and their brethren in particular, in 1848 that “we must all do battle either for or against the Redeemer of the world.”

In the wake of the manumission era, demographic shifts redefined the upcountry Quaker community and influenced the direction of their religious crusade against slavery moving forward. Quaker strongholds in the upcountry, particularly in the North Carolina Piedmont, remained active and influential throughout the antebellum and Civil War eras. However, starting in the 1820s, droves of Southern Friends left the upland South to establish new homes in free states. Mostly en route to Indiana and Ohio, the movement marked a mass Quaker exodus to the Midwest that would persist throughout the remainder of the antebellum and Civil War eras. Some may have left the South in order to distance themselves from the sins of slavery. But the Midwest offered new opportunities to challenge slavery, and many began to labor against the evil institution with renewed fervor. Importantly, the Quaker exodus to the free Midwest proved beneficial to their religious mission to affect an end to slavery. Rather than diminishing their interconnectedness and devotion to the antislavery cause, the migration broadened the Quaker community and made new antislavery initiatives more feasible. In the antebellum era, upcountry

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Quakers—and those of upcountry descent—continued to work together within well established traditions of community-oriented and faith-based resistance to injustice.

In the early nineteenth century, Quaker destinations such as Wayne County, Indiana and Hamilton County, Ohio became extensions of the upcountry. Around 1890, Alethea Coffin, an upcountry-born Quaker, “was able to give the names of more than 300 families that had moved from Guilford county to Indiana between 1805 and 1835.” Impressive no doubt; yet the migration was far from over in the 1830s. Alethea herself left New Garden for Indiana in 1852. Her children migrated as well, albeit in different intervals. Her son, Addison Coffin, relocated in 1843, the first in the immediate family to do so. In his memoir written in the late nineteenth century, Addison recalled being “taught from childhood . . . [that] the great center of Carolina emigration, and the Jerusalem of Quakerism for all the northwest” was Richmond, Indiana.

Upon his arrival in Richmond, Addison found this to be true. He labeled his new neighbors “Hoosier Carolinians” in recognition of their upcountry heritage.

Most particularly, Quaker outmigration strengthened and helped formalize the Underground Railroad in the years between Nat Turner’s Rebellion and the Civil War. For years informal networks of black and white activists had covertly helped fugitive slaves escape to freedom. But the expansion of the Quaker community made it possible for more and more fugitives to flee safely north. “It would fill a large book,” Addison Coffin supposed in his later

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8 In the early nineteenth century Midwestern Quaker communities began to mirror upcountry Quaker Communities. For instance, surnames that were common in North Carolina Quaker Communities such as Dobbins, Jessop/Jessup, Vestal, and Worth were also common in the Indiana Quaker settlements. Quaker settlers in Wayne County, Indiana named their new church building New Garden Meeting House. New Garden was also the name of one of the largest Quaker meetings in North Carolina. Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 106.
9 Addison Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, Written by Himself (Cleveland: William G. Hubbard, 1897). 29.
10 A. Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin. 55-56. Addison Coffin, who traveled part of the way with his friend George Bowman, made the journey from Guilford County, North Carolina to Richmond, Indiana in 1843. Coffin was twenty-one years old at the time. He walked most of the way, but took a steamboat from Charleston, (West) Virginia to Cincinnati, Ohio.
11 Ibid., 76.
years, “to give the principal events connected with the Underground Railroad from North Carolina from 1819 to 1852.”\textsuperscript{12} Coffin and his family contributed to the network’s success. In fact, Addison insisted that his father, Vestal Coffin, formalized the Underground Railroad in 1819 when he coordinated an effort to help “a negro named John Dimery” flee New Garden, North Carolina for Richmond, Indiana.\textsuperscript{13} For years Vestal Coffin, had been “in the front rank of anti-slavery men” in North Carolina.\textsuperscript{14} But his work with John Dimery in 1819—and soon after with Dimery’s family—transformed him from a spokesperson for emancipation to an agent on the railroad to freedom.

Vestal Coffin died in 1826, but other Friends in and from the upcountry built upon his work, including his immediate family. It is likely that the Underground Railroad would have lost momentum without Alethea Coffin who continued her husband’s efforts after he passed away. Addison remembered that, “After my father's death many fugitives continued to come to the old home, and my mother would advise and counsel with them as time and opportunity offered.”\textsuperscript{15}

The Coffin brothers, Addison and Alfred, inherited their father’s antislavery zeal and “spirit of adventure,” and both dedicated themselves to the Underground Railroad while still boys in Guilford County.\textsuperscript{16} In time, Alfred became “one of the chief managers in North Carolina,” a position he maintained for approximately fifteen years. However, after authorities learned of his work, he and his family fled to Indiana in 1852.\textsuperscript{17} Likewise, Addison labored for approximately eight years on the Underground Railroad in North Carolina, before relocating and continuing his service in the Midwest. Unlike his brother who worked behind the scenes as “general manager,”

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 19-21.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 17, 19.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{16} The brothers never labored alongside of their father on the Underground Railroad. Addison was only four when his father passed away. He began working on the Underground Railroad in 1835 at the age of thirteen. Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{17} In 1853, Alfred “had to flee for his life, being betrayed by one whom he least suspected, in aiding fugitive slaves to escape. Ibid., 14.
Addison’s “ability to locate and remember places . . . made me peculiarly fitted for the
dangerous position of conductor.” In the 1890s, Addison recalled that as a young man he “could
‘out wind’ in running any boy or man in the neighborhood,” a trait that made him valuable in the
field. 18 Also of chief importance were Levi and Catherine Coffin. Levi, who was Vestal’s
cousin and close associate, eventually “became famed as an Abolitionist,” and recognized as the
“president” of the Underground Railroad. Rightfully so, however, in his memoir, Addison
Coffin respectfully insists that Levi “took his first lessons under my father,” an observation that
Levi’s own written account suggests was true. 19

If Vestal Coffin began the process of formalizing the Underground Railroad, Levi and
Catherine Coffin saw his vision through. Together they labored ceaselessly to hone the
Underground Railroad into a sophisticated network of agents and safe houses that stretched from
the upcountry to the Midwest. Both born in the North Carolina Piedmont, the Coffins left for
Newport, Indiana soon after their marriage in 1824, where they stayed until they relocated to
Cincinnati in 1847. 20 In the Midwest, the Coffins worked to awaken their neighbors’, Quakers
and non-Quakers alike, sense of moral responsibility to others, by urging them to embrace the
antislavery cause with fervor. Their efforts bore fruit. Opposition to slavery in the Midwest
became more active and political over time. Referring to the Underground Railroad, Levi
recalled that “Friends in the neighborhood, who had formerly stood aloof from the work, fearful
of the penalty of the law, were encouraged to engage in it” after he and Catherine began
organizing. 21 By the early 1840s, the abolitionist movement in parts of the Midwest was

18 Ibid., 8.
19 Ibid., 19.
20 Today Newport is known as Fountain City. It is located in Wayne County in eastern Indiana, and should not be
confused with the town of Newport located in Vermillion County in western Indiana. Newport (former) is
approximately sixty miles northwest of Cincinnati.
exhibiting its upcountry, and particularly Quaker, tilt. Soon after arriving in Indiana in 1843, Addison Coffin accompanied his cousin Levi to an abolition convention in Wayne County. Particularly “pleased with its make-up,” he approximated that “four-fifths of them [were] Carolinians and of Carolina descent, and over half bore Nantucket names, [such] as Coffin, Gardner, Worth, Starbuck, Folgier, Macy, Swain, Hussey, etc., etc., and all had a look of deep, unflinching purpose in their eyes.”

![Figures 7 & 8: Levi Coffin and Catherine Coffin. Renderings from L. Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*. title page.](image)

As the movement strengthened, the Coffins utilized preexisting ties of kinship and community to arrange stops on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line where agents concealed, directed, fed, and provided shelter for runaways. The Coffin home was no exception. Levi

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22 A. Coffin, *Life and Travels of Addison Coffin*, 59. The Quaker community in nineteenth century North Carolina had strong ancestral ties to Nantucket. Attending Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1843, Addison Coffin noticed those around him “were largely Nantucket emigrants from North Carolina, and the older ones were manumissionists from the Carolina school of Benjamin Lundy, being whale fishermen in the past, they were now fishers of men.” Ibid., 57.
remembered that “seldom a week passed without our receiving passengers. . . We found it necessary to be always prepared to receive such company.”23 Once in the home, the duty of caring for the fugitives largely fell upon Catherine’s shoulders. Tirelessly “preparing victuals” and making up pallets before the fire, Levi later insisted that “it was never too cold or stormy . . . [Catherine’s] sympathy for those in distress never tired.”24 Caring for the “destitute” runaways included supplying fresh suits of clothes. Likely at the insistence of Catherine, women in the Newport community “organized a sewing society” which frequently met at the Coffin home “to make clothes for the fugitives.”25 Over twenty years later, women in the Coffins’ Cincinnati neighborhood formed the “Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle” to provide clothing for “destitute” runaways making their way through Ohio.26

The network was also comprised of black activists dedicated to helping others reach freedom. Laboring together in a common cause, the Coffins and other Quakers recognized individuals such as Solomon, a slave who belonged to “Old General Hamilton, as valuable members of their social and political community.27 Working from within the South, Solomon “examine[d] every coffle of slaves to which he could gain access,” and would smuggle “kidnapped negroes” to “some rendezvous” in the woods near New Garden where they would meet with Quaker agents. The risks that Solomon took enabled captives such as Benjamin Benson to eventually reach freedom.28 Husband and wife, Arch and Vina Curry, were also tied into the local Quaker community. In his memoir, Addison Coffin remembered that Arch was a “free negro.” He did not clarify Vina’s status; however, because she worked as a washer woman

24 Ibid., 112-113.
25 Ibid., 113.
26 Members of the Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle included “Mrs. Sarah H. Ernst, Miss Sarah O. Ernst, Mrs. Henry Miller, Mrs. Dr. Aydelott, Mrs. Julia Harwood, Mrs. Amanda E. Foster, Mrs. Elizabeth Coleman, Mrs. Mary Mann, Mrs. Mary M. Guild, Miss K. Emery, and others.” Ibid., 112-113, 300.
27 A. Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, 37.
for the Quaker boarding school in New Garden, it appears that she too was free. It is possible that they both assisted the Underground Railroad during their lives; however, Arch’s death provided Vina with an opportunity to become particularly political. Though it doesn’t appear that Vina herself ever attempted to leave the South, after Arch died she often lent his “free papers” to fugitives fleeing the Guilford County area. The scheme was highly organized; it rested solidly on Vina’s efforts, but depended on a network of associates working in concert with one another. Describing the complex system, Addison Coffin explained that when “there were one or more families of trusty emigrants going West, the free papers were stolen, and the fugitive sent through as a free man to Levi Coffin, who returned the papers in safety.”

Ultimately, Levi and Catherine remained active in the Underground Railroad for over thirty years. Levi estimated that over time they helped approximately three thousand slaves reach freedom, the majority of which they “had the satisfaction of sheltering . . . and feeding” in their own home. Their clandestine operations continued during the Civil War, and Levi later asserted that they would have persisted indefinitely “had not Abraham Lincoln broken up the business by proclamation in 1863.” Yet Levi and Catherine Coffin did not work alone. The Coffins ability to aid fugitive slaves relied on the cooperation of a vast network which included activists in the Southern upcountry, as well as émigrés to the Midwest. As Quakers in Indiana and Ohio continued the battle against worldly injustice, they did so with one foot still planted firmly in the upland South. They worked within a religious framework honed in the South, and relied on community networks developed over generations in the upcountry.

Religion, experience, and region fused together to form a distinctive brand of Upper South Quakerism, or perhaps more accurately upcountry Quakerism, which became increasingly

29 A. Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, 45.
30 L. Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, 671.
and expressly concerned with eradicating slavery in the thirty years preceding the Civil War. Though the antislavery cause was far from lost on their northern counterparts, Upper South Quakers daily witnessed the evils of slavery in their own backyards. This geographic closeness to slavery influenced collective antislavery resolve within the upcountry Quaker community. Southern Quakers’ proximity to slavery also allowed some, such as Levi and Vestal Coffin, to become intimately involved with slaves and antislavery activities within their own communities. These memories and experiences accompanied Levi Coffin and likeminded Quakers as they journeyed west. While it is likely that some Quakers relocated to Indiana and Ohio in order to put the evils of slavery out of mind, the Coffins’ collective resume clearly indicates that others remained determined to carry on the struggle against injustice in a new locale. Thus, upcountry Quakerism, the blend of Quaker religion and Southern experience, found an adoptive home in the Midwest.

Religious scruples grounded the Coffins’ misgivings about slavery, and guided their responses to it. From a young age, antislavery attitudes surrounded Levi Coffin and Catherine White in their North Carolina Quaker community. In his memoir, Levi noted that his “parents and grandparents were opposed to slavery,” therefore he claimed to have “inherited my anti-slavery principles.”

32 It is probable that the White family—who were neighbors of the Coffins and members of the same monthly meeting for years—held similar antislavery convictions which likely proved influential in shaping Catherine’s activism. Community attitudes and efforts beyond the immediate family also shaped the Coffins’ antislavery work. In later years, Levi remembered that during his youth “Quakers at New Garden . . . were opposed to slavery and friendly to colored people.”

33 Some, at least, worked to aid runaways hiding out in the vicinity, a

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32 Ibid., 11.
33 Ibid., 33
moral responsibility to “thy neighbor” that Coffin felt compelled to honor from a young age. It was in this spirit that Levi, while a boy still in his parents’ home, aided his older cousin Vestal and a “gray-haired” enslaved man named Sol to feed and direct passing fugitives.³⁴

For the Coffins and likeminded Quakers, antislavery activism and Christian faith were inseparable; laboring against slavery simply amounted to “Christian duty” as implied by Old Testament Prophets and revealed by Christ in the New Testament.³⁵ According to Quakers, the crux of Christian responsibility rested on Christ’s two “great commandments” requiring Christians to “love the Lord thy God with all thy might” and to “love thy neighbor as thyself.”³⁶ Obedience to both principles urged Quakers to live in accordance with Scripture and to follow Christ’s ministry of “love, meekness, gentleness, [and] kindness” in all pursuits. Christian duty, as understood by Quakers, called true believers to engage in “Christian warfare” against injustice.³⁷

Upcountry Quakers pointed to both of Christ’s great commandments as the fundamental principles guiding their faith and moral choices. They viewed the two as intimately intertwined and together forming the “whole tenor of the Christian religion.”³⁸ However, Upper South Quakers routinely insisted that their activism launched from the latter commandment which urged believers to put their faith into motion. From the eighteenth century through the Civil War era, antislavery upcountry Quakers pointed to the commandment—and often to the spirit of the commandment via the Golden Rule—as their primary call to action.³⁹ For instance, in 1787

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³⁴ Ibid., 20-21.
³⁵ Ibid., 1.
³⁷ Meeting for Sufferings, Proceedings of North Carolina Yearly Meeting on the Subject of Slavery, 3, 4.
³⁸ Ibid., 4.
³⁹ For example, see L. Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, iii; Meeting for Sufferings, Proceedings of North Carolina Yearly Meeting on the Subject of Slavery; and “Petition of the Manumission Society to the Tennessee Legislature,” 1817, on Jefferson County, TN Genealogy and History, http://jefferson.tngenealogy.net/research-
antislavery Quakers from North Carolina asserted that slavery countered “the injunction of our blessed Lord ‘to do unto all men as we would they should do unto us.’”\(^\text{40}\) Similarly, in 1817 East Tennessee manumissionists insisted that God “is pleased” when Christians act charitably toward their fellow man, but is “displeased when any disregard this rule.”\(^\text{41}\) Years later, Levi Coffin maintained the he and Catherine based their antislavery work in “that command, which reads: ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’”\(^\text{42}\) Additionally, an 1848 antislavery address published by the North Carolina Yearly Meeting singled out the second great commandment’s central place in the Society of Friend’s antislavery initiatives for over a century.\(^\text{43}\)

Furthermore, Quakers insisted that the Inner Light illuminated the pathway of Christian responsibility. The North Carolina Yearly Meeting’s 1848 address appealed to this concept, insisting that the Truth—which is revealed to Christians through the moral conscience—makes clear that slavery is “wrong and ought to be abandoned.”\(^\text{44}\) The authors of the report had faith that if individuals searched their souls, true believers could only surmise that “slavery is inconsistent with the requisitions of Christianity.”\(^\text{45}\) With this pronouncement, Upper South Quakers called into question the faith of those who had no ethical qualms with slavery, in effect drawing a line between those “professing Christians” who “love not his neighbor” and the true followers of Christ whose “whole heart was given to God and the cause of righteousness.”\(^\text{46}\) In the process, Southern Friends employed an approach similar to that taken by Northern

\(^{40}\) Meeting for Sufferings, *Proceedings of North Carolina Yearly Meeting on the Subject of Slavery*, 17.


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 4.
Evangelicals who demanded that slavery contradicted the “spirit” of the Bible. In their 1848 petition, Southern Quakers asked:

What says the conscience? In the secret of thy own bosom does it not raise its still voice and chide thee for using they fellow men for they benefit and aggrandizement? Do it not whisper even when thou has sought for arguments to justify slave-holding—they will not do!—We call on all professing Christians to beware how they press a few texts of scripture into justification of slavery, and proceed thereon to erect a structure the foundations of which are laid in the groans and tears and blood of their colored brethren.

All in all, the North Carolina Yearly Meeting’s 1848 antislavery address likely had little impact on the slaveholders they hoped to reach. Most churchgoing slaveholders were no doubt satisfied with the proslavery exhortations that echoed throughout mainline churches across the South. Yet, building upon a century’s worth of antislavery work, Upper South Quakers persisted in their effort to confront injustice in the decade leading up to the Civil War. Moving into the 1850s, local Friends cooperated with likeminded neighbors of various religious stripes in order to strike further blows at slavery. As the slavery debate heated in the 1850s, many Upper South whites placed “true” Christian principles above denomination, and united in their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Old Time Antislavery Protestantism

A lack of consensus on slavery further divided Evangelicals in the South in the late antebellum era. Folk Protestants had started branching off from their mainline denominations in the 1820s. While disaffected Baptists formed various independent Old School congregations, some disenchanted Methodists found a home in the newly formed Methodist Protestant Church. While grievances involving church government and the ministry were often at the forefront of denominational debates, honoring their religious tradition’s original stance on slavery became an

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47 For the Northern evangelical approach, see Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 51-74.
important concern for some folk Protestants. In the process, disagreements over slavery exacerbated internal tensions and caused Southern churches to fracture even more. Folk Protestants were not a likeminded collective; however, as a rule evangelical sub-denominations claimed to value religious tradition. Though they interpreted tradition differently, folk Protestants resolved to honor the vision of their denomination’s pioneers. For some, this required reconsidering the Southern Orthodoxy’s proslavery position. While Baptists and Presbyterians occasionally espoused a tradition-based opposition to slavery, Methodists, in particular, recalled John Wesley’s aversion to the “peculiar institution,” as well as the Southern Methodist church’s original antislavery stance. Because folk Methodists were not of one stripe, they responded in a variety of ways. Following the Plan of Separation, some reluctantly aligned with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But others refused fellowship with the Southern Conference, some of which established antislavery Methodist congregations in parts of the upcountry.

The 1844 church schism that divided the national Methodist conference into two unaffiliated sections, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, aggravated religious tensions in the South. The dispute between Northern and Southern clergy over the morality of appointing a slaveholding bishop brought the religious debate over slavery further onto the national stage. But the Plan of Separation, and the discourse that surrounded it, forced Southern Methodists to confront the slavery issue as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, Methodists in Holston Conference, which encompassed much of the hill country of East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and Southwest Virginia, were bitterly divided over the church split, and the relationship between slavery and religious tradition was at the very root of the complications.
Though the controversy in Holston Conference cannot be defined as a clear-cut clash between proslavery and antislavery factions, those who opposed joining the new Southern Conference were more likely to hold antislavery views. Reared in the old tradition, disaffected upcountry Methodists such as Tennessean George Ekin refused to bend to a brand of proslavery Evangelicalism that stood at odds with their understanding of Methodism as practiced in “the old Church.”\textsuperscript{49} Instead, “Father Ekin” and others hoped to “do as we have done—serve God without a slaveholding bishop.”\textsuperscript{50} In a letter to his grandson dated December 5, 1844, Ekin made clear that he, at least, “intend[ed] to stick to the old ship as long as I live.”\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, ten years later, in the mid-1850s Asheville minister Eli Hutsell and his flock still did “not believe in a slaveholding bishop.”\textsuperscript{52} Methodists in Wythe County in Southwest Virginia, too, stood “firm to the old ship” because they opposed the appointment of a slaveholding bishop.\textsuperscript{53} Local resistance to joining the Southern Conference proved so strong that pro-schism Holston ministers traveled to Wythe County to drum up support. Once they departed, James St. Claire reported that he and his “poor wife” were “cast off by all the preachers. . . . Our names are cast out as evil; we are called abolitionists.”\textsuperscript{54} Complicating matters, St. Claire points out that these visiting ministers were not strangers, but former friends who in the past “have eaten at our table and been sheltered from the storms under our roof.”\textsuperscript{55} Likewise, antislavery principles forced Methodists in nearby Grayson County, such as Isaac Moore, to refuse fellowship with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. According to Adam Crooks, a Northern antislavery missionary who spent time


\textsuperscript{50} George Ekin to George Eakin Naff, December 5, 1844, in Price, Holston Methodism: Vol. II, 434.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Price, Holston Methodism: Vol. II, 434.

\textsuperscript{53} Martin, Methodism in Holston, 64.

\textsuperscript{54} Price, Holston Methodism: Vol. II, 436.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 436.
in Southwest Virginia in the late 1840s, Moore was an “old veteran for truth.” He and other Grayson County Methodists, including the “majority of the Hopewell Church” charged that “slavery was the great wedge that split the Church.” They further pronounced that the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South hardly resembled John Wesley’s church. By choosing worldly influence over principle and tradition, the actions of Southern Methodist leaders made clear that sin had led them astray from the founder’s intent. In response, Isaacs and other Grayson County Methodists “resolved to be disconnected from all Church organization until they found one free from the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment.”

Other Protestants in the upcountry also pointed out the distance between John Wesley’s religion and mainstream Methodism in the late antebellum era. Dunkard Elder John Kline frequently attended Methodist churches around the Shenandoah Valley. Visiting a Methodist church in Rappahannock County in 1853, he could not help but note the beauty of the church building and its interior furnishings. Yet, he was silently critical of the “display of fashion everywhere visible” among the congregation. Seating himself upon “a pew cushioned with silk velvet,” Kline wondered “what John Wesley would think of that being a congregation of Methodists, could he suddenly appear among them. Would he own them? And would they own him in his plain dress and old-fashioned ways?” Addressing slavery directly, Hinton Rowan Helper from Davie County, North Carolina reminded Southern Methodists that John Wesley was an abolitionist who defined “‘American Slavery . . . [as] the sum of all villainies.’” Other Methodist pioneers also denounced the institution, he insisted, including Adam Clarke who

57 Ibid., 34-35.
59 Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 269.
declared that those who trade or claim to own humans “are men-stealers, and God classes them with the most flagitious of mortals.” In the *Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, Helper additionally directed Southern Methodists to the General Conference’s’ 1785 resolution which stated, “We do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of slavery, and shall not cease to seek its destruction, by all wise and prudent means.”

Holston Methodists were not alone in their dissent from the Methodist mainstream in the South. Others in the upcountry deviated from the Southern Orthodoxy by insisting that slavery and slaveholding were incompatible with Christianity and religion according to John Wesley. The Speer and Thomasson families from the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina never defected from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Nevertheless, the Methodism they embraced lacked the proslavery appeal that was becoming a central characteristic of Southern Evangelicalism in the antebellum era. Aquilla and Elizabeth Speer, devout members of Providence Methodist Church in Yadkin County, detested the institution of slavery and taught their children to loathe it as well. Their writings, which frequently referenced religious responsibility and spiritual concern, leave no doubt that faith guided the family in virtually all thoughts and matters, including their opposition to slavery. Upon encountering a coffle of slaves in her neighborhood, in 1853, eighteen year old Ann Speer lamented that “a man, one that God created, endowed with rationality, and possessing feelings like us, [could be] chained like a brute.” Recognizing the sinful nature of the domestic slave trade, Ann charged that “that speculator must possess a heart of steel that he can engage in a traffic so sordid and debasing.”

Basil and Mollie Thomasson exhibited a similar devotion to living their faith. The Thomassons frequently attended camp meetings and visited various Methodist churches in and

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60 Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 269.
around their home in Iredell County. However, they were members of Aylesbury Methodist Church in Yadkin County where Basil, a farmer by trade, taught Sunday school before becoming a lay minister in 1861.\textsuperscript{62} Though affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Thomassons were hardly concerned with social influence and material wealth. Diary entries that Basil wrote in the 1850s and early 1860s indicate that he was unimpressed by “treasure in this world.” Instead, he remained focused on “the goodly land, of which I read in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{63} Basil Thomasson was also no supporter of slavery, or the Confederacy to boot. In April 1861 he insisted to his brother that God would wipe out the South’s “darling institution” in due time, and “there is no power on earth that can prolong its life one hour beyond the appointed time, much less in the fifteen slave states.”\textsuperscript{64} Thomasson also sneered at a writer’s claim that Southerners were “committed” to protecting slavery. The entire Thomasson clan was so uncommitted to slavery that they considered relocating to “Indiana or Illinois” before the war erupted.\textsuperscript{65}

Although members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Thomassons and Speers practiced a type of old time Methodism that diverged from the Southern Orthodoxy on the key point of slavery. Neither of the families appear to have been overly concerned with, nor influenced by, a proslavery gospel being evangelized by nonlocal church leadership. The Thomassons and Speers did not record how they acquired their antislavery views. As with others in the upcountry, it is likely that a variety of demographic, economic, and political factors influenced their attitude regarding slavery. Nevertheless, their writings make clear that their Christian faith, more particularly their perception of Methodism, helped shape their opposition to slavery.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., xxii.
\textsuperscript{64} Basil A. Thomasson to “Brother,” April 1861, in \textit{North Carolina Yeoman}, 350-351.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
The retention of old time antislavery Protestantism was most apparent in areas surrounding Quaker communities, particularly in the North Carolina Piedmont where Quakers and non-Quakers lived among one another, and regularly interacted in home, work, and public spaces. They contributed to the same community, intermarried, and raised children together. Sharing common spaces allowed an exchange of religious and social ideas that was unavailable to most Southerners. Significantly, both the Thomasson and Speer families were close with Quaker neighbors, regularly “sharing work,” and attending church services together, where they were inspired by Quaker principles. As Jennie Speers confided to her diary in 1850, she believed that Quakers “live nearer the standard of the Bible than any other denomination.”66 Thus, it is likely that this frequent exchange allowed some upcountry Protestants to retain the antislavery resolve that characterized “primitive” evangelical religion.

Quaker values appear to have influenced some folk Baptists. Primitive Baptists left little evidence to suggest how they interpreted slavery within their very particular religious framework. But Separate Baptists were less elusive. Like Primitive Baptists, Separate Baptists’ respect for tradition caused them to dissent from the Baptist mainstream. Notably, however, Separates diverged from Primitives on key points of emphasis, namely their support for mission work and Sunday schools. Separate Baptists appear to have been less numerous than Primitives in the upcountry as a whole. Yet Separate Baptist congregations extended throughout the Quaker counties. The sub-denomination’s founder, Shubal Stearns, organized the first Separate Baptist Churches in North Carolina into the Sandy Creek Association in the years prior to the American Revolution. At the same time, Stearns found common ground with backcountry

Quakers, particularly Herman Husband and his interdenominational band of Quaker and evangelical Regulators, who felt little affinity with the eastern elite.

Separate Baptists of the Sandy Creek Association continued to honor their tradition of dissent well after Stearns’s generation had passed. As late as 1835 the leadership of Sandy Creek Baptist Association, still thriving in the heart of Quaker country, resolved that slavery “is inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel of Christ.” They resolved to “advise” their respective congregations to avoid any complicity with the institution, and threatened to “exclude members who will not abandon the practice.”67 A similar declaration had been made in 1808, but the 1835 pronouncement appears to be Sandy Creek’s final antislavery address.68 Quite possibly, legislation passed after Nat Turner’s Rebellion which prohibited public pronouncements against slavery kept Sandy Creek Separate Baptists quiet after this point. Nevertheless, the 1835 resolutions are significant. At a time when the mainline Baptist establishment was solidifying its proslavery stance, Sandy Creek elders representing nineteen churches across four counties agreed that their respective flocks should be cleansed of the sin and that six other Baptist conferences in the region in which they were in correspondence should be notified immediately of their decision.69

However, disaffected Methodists in Quaker Country expressed a more obvious aversion to slavery in the later antebellum era. In parts of the Piedmont, antislavery Methodists willingly received and read abolitionist tracts distributed by Quakers, and quite possibly assisted the Friends in their efforts.70 In 1843, for instance, local Quakers circulated two thousand copies of

an abolitionist pamphlet authored by Reverend Edward Smith, an antislavery Ohio Methodist minister. A Northern missionary later insisted that the document hardened foothill Methodist antislavery resolve and influenced the direction of local Methodism moving forward. In particular, following the 1844 Plan of Separation, some Guilford County Methodists who rejected the Southern church’s position on slavery refused to align with the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A disillusioned Methodist from Guilford County’s Jamestown community noted that “there are many Methodists with whom I am partially acquainted, who, together with myself, feel so conscientiously scrupulous on the subject of slavery, that we cannot hold fellowship with the M.E. Church, South.” Included was Reverend Daniel Wilson, a Guilford County native whose father was a Quaker and whose mother was a “true and zelous [sic] Methodist of the old Wesley stamp.” Though generally “religiously enclinced [sic],” he decided to join the Methodist Episcopal Church after attending camp meeting in Greensboro in 1831. Wilson began “exhorten” a few years later at the age of twenty, and by the time of the Plan of Separation had served as the resident minister for a local congregation for nearly ten years. Disillusioned by the church schism, Wilson insisted that he had no desire to preach in the “Southern wing of the Church,” which he charged was designed and “accomplished by Southern Slave Holders.”

In the wake of the Plan of Separation, disenchanted Methodists around Guilford County hoped to establish an independent Methodist conference or seek fellowship with an existing church that practiced antislavery Christianity, or, as they termed it, “true and vital religion.” Around this time, Guilford Methodists organized the “Free Methodist Church,” a homegrown

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 “Letter from Jamestown, North Carolina,” True Wesleyan, November 14, 1846.
folk branch of Methodism founded on antislavery principles and dedicated to honoring John Wesley’s opposition to the institution.⁷⁵ A lack of evidence suggests that the Free Methodist Church was short-lived. Antislavery Methodism, however, persisted in the Piedmont and gained strength after 1845. In October of that year, a Guilford County Methodist—likely a Free Methodist—contacted the Northern-based “Wesleyan Methodist Church.” Upon learning that the “order of Wesleyan Methodists . . . holds no fellowship with slaveholders,” he requested the Church Discipline as well as copies of the True Wesleyan, the denomination’s main publication largely devoted to abolition and exposing the evils of slavery.⁷⁶

In the late 1840s North Carolina and Ohio Methodists cooperated to establish Wesleyan Methodism in the upcountry. Aided by Northern missionaries Adam Crooks, Jarvis Bacon, and Jesse McBride, local antislavery Methodists began planting Wesleyan congregations in the North Carolina Piedmont around 1846. As “calls to ‘Come over and help us,’ multiplied,” Crooks and Bacon traveled further “into the regions beyond.” In due time, they extended their missionary work northwest toward the Blue Ridge into Grayson County, Virginia.⁷⁷ Soon after his arrival, local churches, particularly Protestant Methodist congregations, frequently invited Crooks to preach. Importantly, the abolition of slavery was at the vanguard of the Wesleyan mission, and Crooks noted that he “seldom preach[ed] without denouncing the peculiar institution.”⁷⁸ Wesleyan Methodists hoped to awaken Protestants who passively acquiesced to the status quo, and they hoped to cleanse “corrupt churches” that turned a blind eye to slavery, including both branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church as well as the Methodist Protestant Church. Priding

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⁷⁵ Roy S. Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South: Being the Story of Eighty-Six Years of Reform and Religious Activities in the South as Conducted by the American Wesleyans (Syracuse, N.Y.: The Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1933), 27.
⁷⁸ Ibid., 25.
themselves on their convictions, Wesleyans charged that proslavery Methodism hardly resembled the “True Wesleyan” religion espoused by the founders of Methodism. An August 8, 1851 article in the *True Wesleyan* stated:

> The term Methodists embraces several distinct organizations . . . [but] Wesleyan Methodists of America, is the only organized body of Methodists that repudiates all slaveholding, and makes non-slaveholding a test of fellowship. For professed Christians to own, and buy and sell their brethren and sisters in Christ, comes but little if any short of the crime of Judas. Christ receives that which is done to his disciples as done to himself.”

Though Wesleyan Methodists were a minority denomination in the upcountry, the church prospered in specific locales as disillusioned Protestants welcomed having a new religious choice that better suited their religious and moral principles. Around 1848 Wesleyans hosted their first camp meeting in the upcountry at Union Meeting House in Guilford County. Describing the ten day event as “heaven in miniature,” Crooks estimated that “about one hundred and fifty professed to be converted and seventy-six joined. This was the best meeting I have ever attended.”

> Following successes in Alamance and Guilford counties, Crooks expanded his mission into nearby Piedmont counties where sympathetic Methodists and others welcomed his work. In Randolph County, “Father Briles” who had “been a standard bearer in the Methodist Episcopal Church for about forty years, said, ‘we must build a *large* church.” Overcome by enthusiasm, Briles exclaimed, “oh! I feel such an interest I could almost build it myself.”

Another local resident “rode ten miles” to hear the Wesleyans’ antislavery message, and joined the church on the spot. In 1850 the congregations of Lane’s Chapel and Lovejoy Chapel in

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79 *True Wesleyan*, August 8, 1851.
81 Ibid., 30.
82 Ibid., 30.
Montgomery County extended an invitation to Crooks to share his message with them.\(^{83}\)

Included was William Hurley, a former mainline Methodist with a longstanding aversion to slavery, who defected to the Wesleyans as soon as the opportunity arose.\(^{84}\) Other Montgomery residents including members of the Hulin and Moore families readily switched their allegiance to the Wesleyan Methodist Church.\(^{85}\) Similarly, upon an initial visit to Southwest Virginia, Adam Crooks preached “to a large, attentive, and deeply affected concourse” and was “told it had the happy effect of killing much prejudice.”\(^{86}\) The Virginia mission proved so effective that “the meeting was protracted ten days,” in which the “house and surrounding country was soon rendered vocal with cries of seekers and the shouts of saints.”\(^{87}\) At this time, the Wesleyans admitted a number of new converts, including former members of the mainline Methodist church, as well as “Primitive Methodists” and others that claimed no formal church affiliation.


\(^{84}\) Crooks, Life of Rev. A. Crooks, 92.


\(^{86}\) Crooks, Life of Rev. A. Crooks, 29.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 29.
As Wesleyan Methodism grew it threatened the stability of the Southern religious establishment. The mainline churches lost some of their membership and sway as the Wesleyan Methodist Church grew in numbers and influence. In 1849 the North Carolina conference of the Methodist Protestant Church reported with regret that the arrival of the Wesleyan church had caused its membership to suffer.\textsuperscript{88} The hit not only impacted the laity. Former Methodist Protestant minister William Anderson left the denomination and became active in the Wesleyan church.\textsuperscript{89} This experience was not exclusive to the Methodist Protestant Church; the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and likely other churches experienced losses as well. According to Reverend Daniel Wilson, the “other churches became alarmed for fear that we Would out Strip any of the older churches I [sic] the south.”\textsuperscript{90}

But church and community leaders also viewed Wesleyan Methodism as a danger to the Southern social order. A leader in the Methodist Protestant Church feared that the Piedmont had

\textsuperscript{88} Nicholson, \textit{Wesleyan Methodism in the South}, 46–47.
\textsuperscript{89} Wilson, “Rev. Daniel Wilson Autobiography,” 1532.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
“been disturbed by the spirit of abolitionism,” and noted that it “has prevailed to some extent.”

Another local minister of an unknown denomination held that if “these abolitionist preachers were killed for their doctrines, they have created followers who would keep the abolition ball in motion after their decease.” Similarly, around 1850 lay member William Hurley informed a crowd, including a collection of mainline Methodists, Baptists, and slaveholders, that his church would readily receive a slave, but not a slaveholder. The statement outraged Aaron Sanders, sheriff of Montgomery County and a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. To Hurley and others standing around, Sanders cried “What!—receive a nigger and not a white man? This is a grand insult.”

Wesleyan Methodism threatened stability and a status quo defined by the dominant religious and political leadership in the South. Therefore, in places where the denomination flourished Wesleyans faced serious resistance from the religious and secular slaveocracy, an exchange that illuminated discourses on respectability and citizenship. A rival from Montgomery County summed up the opposition’s view when he insisted that Wesleyans “are the very dregs of the county.” The religious and legal establishments resolved to curb the denomination’s influence by restricting Wesleyan ministers’ access to public spaces. At the dedication for the recently completed Forsyth County Courthouse in December 1850, county officials declared that “ministers of the Gospel of all respectable denominations might preach there, the ‘True Wesleyans’ only excepted.” Similarly, a coalition of slaveholders and religious rivals attempted to eradicate Wesleyanism from its strongholds by force if necessary. Years

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91 Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South, 46-47.
92 Ibid., 46.
93 Crooks, Life of Rev. A. Crooks, 93, 96.
94 Ibid., 96.
95 Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South, 56.
later, Daniel Wilson remembered that “like the Jews of old they Stired up Persecution.”96 In Montgomery County they charged that Wesleyanism was “breeding disturbance” and “making interruptions in families, in neighborhoods, and Churches.”97 After a mob apprehended Reverend Adam Crooks, the local justice of the peace demanded that he “leave the county forthwith, and never preach in it again.”98 In appeal, Crooks pointed to his “right to worship” as he saw fit, as well as his “right, in common with American citizens, to come and go at pleasure.”99 Following similar threats in surrounding counties, including Chatham, Guilford, and Randolph, Crooks and the local Wesleyan leadership agreed that he should seek safety outside of the state. Yet Wesleyanism continued to thrive in the North Carolina Piedmont. Intimidation at the hands of the slaveocracy did little to sway local Wesleyans who never intended to leave their homes and communities. When Sheriff Sanders insisted that William Hurley relocate to a free state, Hurley informed him that “I was born and raised here.”100 As historian Victoria Bynum points out, “slaveholders had prevented Adam Crooks from preaching in their county, but they had failed to prevent the successful birth of Wesleyan Methodism in their community.”101

Aside from the persistently antislavery Quakers and Anabaptists, Methodists were the most apparent hill country whites to dissent from the mainstream en masse in regards to slavery. As the Methodist establishment in the South seceded from the national conference and increasingly promoted a proslavery brand of Christianity, upcountry folk Methodists—particularly in western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia—collectively maintained an appreciation for the “old ship,” including the antislavery convictions

97 Crooks, Life of Rev. A. Crooks, 77.
98 Ibid., 77.
99 Ibid. 78-79.
100 Ibid., 93.
of John Wesley. Upcountry folk Methodists, however, were not entirely of one stripe, and their
dedication to antislavery undoubtedly differed by degrees. Though dissenting Methodists
disagreed with slavery, most were certainly not activists. Rather than confronting slavery
outright, they expressed a passive discontent with the system, often aimed toward the
slaveholding class rather than the enslaved. This camp includes the clergy and lay members of
the Holston Conference who fought, albeit unsuccessfully, to maintain ties with their Northern
brethren rather than regrouping under a slaveholding ecclesiastical leadership. In reality,
dissenting Holston Methodists had no desire for a church structure that mirrored the secular order
that was dominated by a slaveholding elite. Yet, this should not overshadow the fact that
Holston dissenters, though not activists, also had moral qualms with slavery which prevented
them from embracing a sectional church conference dedicated to supporting the institution.

Additionally, folk Methodists such as the Thomassons and Speers, who appear confident
in their antislavery views, had little interest in pushing for abolition. It is quite possible that
other upcountry Methodists shared Basil A. Thomasson’s Providential belief that God would
wipe out slavery in due time. Interestingly, the Thomassons and Speers saw little conflict
between their personal antislavery sentiments and their association with the mainstream
Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Perhaps this speaks to the ability of both families to
compartmentalize their own convictions while taking what the Southern church preached about
slavery with a grain of salt. But given the Thomassons’ and Speers’ fervent dedication to
Methodism, this seems unlikely. Instead, it is possible that defending slavery was not imperative
to clergy on the local level, many of which were like Basil Thomasson, licensed to preach, but
“poor” farmers the other six days of the week. Certainly proslavery Methodism existed
throughout the region. But the Speers’ and Thomassons’ denominational allegiance, as well as
the lack of an inner struggle between personal conscience and church position, suggests that both families worshiped in a nurturing environment among likeminded Methodists. At the very least, participation in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, did nothing to encourage them to support slavery.

Of all the Methodists in the hill country, Wesleyans were by far the most overt in their criticisms of slavery, as well as the religious and social orders in the antebellum South. Wesleyan Methodists made it very clear that fervent opposition to slavery and slaveholding were the unwavering cornerstones of their faith. Antislavery principles alone prevented Wesleyans from worshiping in the mainline church, and ultimately encouraged them to seek fellowship with Northern abolitionists. Despite stringent state laws prohibiting antislavery speech and actions, hill country Wesleyans preached antislavery Christianity in their churches and helped spread abolitionist tracts throughout their communities.

**Transdenominational Antislavery Appeals**

“To say that the Bible sanctions slavery is to say that the sun loves darkness; to say that one man was created to domineer over another is to call in question the justice mercy, and goodness of God.”

Upper South opponents of slavery, regardless of denomination or social station, found religious meaning in their dissent. Quakers and folk Methodists may have been the most likely to express their disapproval of, and often aversion to, slavery. However, others ranging from backcountry Separate Baptists to upstanding Episcopalians, as well as those without an apparent denominational affiliation, occasionally strayed from the mainstream by casting doubt on the Biblical legitimacy of slavery as purported by mainline clerics. In the process, a diverse array of Upper South whites—including clergy, laypeople, and secular actors—drew from common

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102 Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 276.
religious imagery and applied nearly identical religious pronouncements to condemn slavery. Collectively insisting that slavery was unchristian, antislavery Protestants employed similar interpretations of Scripture, Christian duty, and Providence, that stood in contrast to those put forth by the Southern Evangelical mainstream.

Antislavery Southerners ranging from clergymen like Eli Washington Caruthers to secular reformers like Hinton Rowan Helper—who never alluded to a church affiliation—rested their case against slavery in Christianity. Born in 1793, North Carolina Presbyterian minister Eli Washington Caruthers remained grounded in the old time evangelicalism of his youth. For over twenty years—starting in the 1840s and continuing throughout the Civil War—Caruthers crafted an ongoing essay, amounting to over four hundred pages, detailing his opposition to slavery and slaveholding. Entitled “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Slaveholders,” Caruthers planted his antislavery thesis firmly in his Christian faith and called slaveholders to acknowledge and abandon their immorality. But at the same time, upcountry whites whose antislavery principles largely derived from secular factors also utilized Christian-inspired moral suasion to bolster their own arguments. Perhaps most notable, in *The Impending Crisis of the South*, Hinton Rowan Helper steeped his argument for abolition in economic theory and class anxiety. But Helper, nearly forty years Caruthers’s junior, also drew from the old time Protestantism that he had encountered in the North Carolina foothills, and used it to make appeals to the Christian conscience that he deemed indisputable. Therefore, while Caruthers and Helper may have approached their manuscripts from different angles, they shared in the belief that slavery and Christianity, when logically considered, were incompatible and unarguable.

Antislavery dissenters and the proslavery mainstream used the Bible differently. In contrast to the mainline clergy’s Scriptural defense of the slavery, dissenting Protestants
collectively used the Bible to point out the wickedness inherent in slavery. Both Eli Caruthers and Hinton Helper referred to the Bible as the “textbook” that outlines God’s will for humankind, and makes an apparent case against slavery when considered in its entirety.

Caruthers, a devoted Presbyterian, had no doubt that Americans, as “a Christian & a protestant people,” understood the importance of taking “the Scriptures for our guide.” Yet he charged that “in numberless cases, we utterly fail in the application,” largely because Satan had misled individuals into reading the Bible selectively.\(^\text{103}\) However, he warned Christians that there existed only one Truth which “will be maintained against all opposition from men & devils.”\(^\text{104}\)

Instead, Caruthers declares that, when “the great text Book” is considered in its entirety, it makes clear that slavery contradicts Divine Law.\(^\text{105}\) Caruthers agreed with the Southern Orthodoxy that slavery existed in the Bible. However, he charged that its practice throughout history provided no proof that the institution “is right and that we or any other people can perpetuate it without woeful criminality” in God’s court of law.\(^\text{106}\) Rather, Caruthers pointed to Old Testament revelations—particularly Exodus 10:8 in which God commanded Pharaoh to “Let my People go”—to illuminate “the fundamental principle that you can have no right to hold anything as property without an express grant from the Creator.”\(^\text{107}\)

Secular writer Hinton Helper utilized strikingly similar antislavery arguments. In *The Impending Crisis of the South*, Helper asserted that the Bible “is the only original and complete anti-slavery textbook.”\(^\text{108}\) Helper too attacked the proslavery camp’s claim that the Bible provided a justification for bondage. He conceded that slavery could be found throughout the

\(^{103}\) “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Slaveholders,” Eli Washington Caruthers Papers, Rubenstein Library, Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, hereafter cited as RL.

\(^{104}\) Ibid. 2

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 29.


\(^{108}\) Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 275.
Bible, but held that closer inspection reveals that “the Deity never approved it.” A Biblical
defense of slavery, according to Helper, characterized God as merciless and unjust; a
misrepresentation that he viewed as nothing short of an insult to Christianity. Instead, Helper
held that slavery was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, “one of the monstrous inventions of
Satan.” Helper partially excused “those venerable old fogies, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,”
whose practice of slavery coincided with the “barbarous age” in which they lived. But he had
little sympathy for planters in the nineteenth century South who he alleged practiced a much
harsher form of slavery than even the “worst” forms of bondage found in the Bible. The only
thing darker than American slavery found in the Bible was “the evil-one and his hot home.”

The commonalities did not stop there. Antislavery Southerners representing a diverse
array of religious traditions expressed nearly identical religious appeals against slavery as those
recorded by folk Presbyterian Eli Caruthers and yeoman advocate Hinton Helper. In 1835
Separate Baptists in the Sandy Creek Association resolved that slavery countered “the Gospel of
Christ.” Similarly, Quaker activist Levi Coffin insisted that the “sin of slavery . . . [was]
contrary to the teachings of the gospel.” “The Bible,” he believed, “was the best anti-slavery
book we had,” and the establishment’s use of it to “reconcile slavery” was an impossible task.
Coffin disregarded “Jewish servitude” in the Old Testament as God’s approval of slavery. To
the contrary, he urged that Christ’s teachings in the New Testament provided a moral code that
God expected believers to abide by. In the simplest terms, Coffin insisted, as did other Southern

109 Ibid., 275-276.
110 Ibid., 275.
111 Ibid., 275.
112 Scholars debate how Hinton Rowan Helper should be classified. However, Helper identified himself as a
yeoman and claimed to be the voice of the Southern yeomanry.
113 Purefoy, A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association, 161-162; 163-164.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., 502.
Quakers, that slavery ignored Christ’s basic command to “do to others as we would have others do to us.”\textsuperscript{117} In relation, in 1848 Southern Friends at the North Carolina Yearly Meeting concluded that using the Bible as a proslavery tool dangerously misled hopeful Christians and made “Christianity itself a mockery!” The Yearly Meeting conceded that slavery was present in the Bible; however, they doubted that the Greek and Hebrew translations of “slavery” corresponded with the race-based institution then practiced in the United States.\textsuperscript{118}

Similarly, Mary Berkley Minor Blackford, a devout Virginia Episcopalian and member of the slaveholding elite, rejected the Scriptural defenses of slavery she encountered in church and within her social and family network. She held that slavery had corrupted the South to a point in which “professors of religion” were blind to their own sins, and unconcerned with “human rights and human suffering.”\textsuperscript{119} Though appalled by present conditions, Blackford had faith that “the time will come when we shall look back and wonder how Christians could sanction slavery.”\textsuperscript{120} Inspired by the Prophet Isaiah’s call in the Old Testament “‘to loose [\textit{sic}] the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free,’” Blackford used her influence, especially as a mother, to push for reform from within.\textsuperscript{121} In particular, she provided an alternative antislavery religious framework in the home that countered the proslavery agenda pushed by the Southern Episcopal mainstream. Mary Blackford’s religious instruction geared toward teaching her children to “hate slavery,” proved effective. While studying at the University of Virginia in the 1850s, Launcelot “Lanty” Minor Blackford shared with his mother a realization that Providence had placed him in a position to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 504.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Meeting for Sufferings, \textit{Proceedings of North Carolina Yearly Meeting on the Subject of Slavery}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Diary of Mary Berkley Minor Blackford, 1832-1833, in L. Minor Blackford, \textit{Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady, Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford, 1802-1896, Who Taught Her Sons to Hate Slavery and to Love the Union} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 39, 42-43.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, 1833, in Blackford, \textit{Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory}, 42-43.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, 1833, in Ibid., 41. Blackford was referencing Isaiah 58:6 in the Old Testament.
\end{itemize}
confront slavery. Repeating the words of Isaiah that had called Mary to action years earlier, Lanyt insisted that he too planned to “choose that path” where he too could “‘loose the bonds of wickedness and let the oppressed go free!’”

White antislavery Christians collectively challenged the proslavery establishment’s Providential justification for slavery which held that “the institution” was “fully sanctioned by the oracles of unerring truth.” Dissenters particularly attacked the Southern Orthodoxy’s claim that God willed American slavery so that benevolent Christian slaveholders could evangelize blacks, in turn saving them from religious ignorance and impending damnation. North Carolina Presbyterian Eli Caruthers was perplexed “that a Protestant, a Christian people—nominally such, as least—are not ashamed to use such an argument.” Virginia Dunkard John Kline noted that many “seemingly good and reasonable people” used Scripture to craft a defense of slavery. However, he believed that “the god of this world has blinded their eyes, so that seeing they see not, and hearing they understand not.” Others agreed, including yeoman activist Hinton Helper who suggested that “to say that one man was created to domineer over another is to call in question the justice, mercy, and goodness of God.”

Caruthers, Hedrick, and other dissenters scrutinized the sinfulness of the proslavery appeal, by pointing to slaves’ humanity and spiritual equality, and demanding that “impious”

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122 Launcelot Blackford [Charlottesville, VA] to Mary Blackford, January 15 [1852?], in Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 99-100.
123 “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders,” Eli W. Caruthers Papers, RL.
126 Helper, The Impending Crisis, 276.
127 Michael Thomas Smith, A Traitor and a Scoundrel: Benjamin Hedrick and the Cost of Dissent (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 43.
laws proscribing slave education denied slaves direct access to God’s word. In contrast to the mainstream, antislavery Protestants charged that slavery and the Southern establishment—not a natural state of degradation—inhibited African Americans’ spiritual growth. Rejecting racist religious assumptions that justified holding people as property, in 1853 Methodist Ann Speer opined that God had cast black and white in the same mold, instilling common faculties in each, including “rationality” and “feelings.”128 Taking it a step further, Presbyterian Eli Caruthers asserted that “all had one Creator & have descended from the same parents. The blacks are of the same flesh & blood with ourselves.”129 Antislavery whites criticized the Southern religious and legal establishments’ coordinated effort to deny slaves access to the Bible. According to Caruthers, Southern laws, rather than racial inferiority, denied African Americans access to the “rights and privileges” of faith that the Lord revealed to all Christians in the New Testament.130 He lamented that “neither they nor their unborn generations shall ever be taught to read the glorious revelation that God” which was “given and designed for them as much as for you.”131 Recognizing that spiritual equality should translate into equal access to God’s word, in 1856 Mary Ellen Hedrick insisted to a proslavery acquaintance that bondage kept individuals from realizing “the sacredness of [their] persons.”132 Episcopalian Mary Blackford echoed these sentiments, and in the 1840s alleged that laws which kept slaves from “learning to read the Bible” were among the many “nameless horrors . . . concentrated in that one word Slavery.”133

As part of their appeal for black humanity and spiritual equality, white dissenters insisted that the institution of slavery was unchristian because it devalued the black family and

128 A. Speer and J. Speer, eds., Sisters of Providence, 147.
129 Ibid., “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders,” Eli W. Caruthers Papers, RL.
130 Ibid., table of contents.
131 Basset, Anti-slavery Leaders in North Carolina, 59.
132 Smith, A Traitor and a Scoundrel, 43.
133 Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, “probably after 1840,” in Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 47.
undermined Christian marriage. Importantly, dissenters held that the domestic slave trade prevented the formation of stable family units. In the midst of a religious debate with a Mississippi planter, Levi Coffin, an upcountry Quaker expatriate, stated that “the separation of husbands and wives, parents and children,” disregarded the Golden Rule and was one of the primary “evils” of slavery.\(^{134}\) Coffin frequently witnessed the wrongs of the slave trade as a youth in North Carolina, and cited the “sin” of forced separation as a factor that influenced his decades of work on the Underground Railroad.\(^{135}\) In a similar vein, in his four hundred page antislavery sermon, Presbyterian minister Eli Caruthers used the sinfulness of the domestic slave trade to bolster his argument that slavery was “unjust” and “unchristian.”\(^{136}\) The “sad tragedy” of the internal trade, he asserted, left “broken hearts and ruined homes.”\(^{137}\) Caruthers drew from his own observations of the slave trade in the North Carolina Piedmont to discredit the proslavery clergy’s insistence that paternalistic slaveholders valued the black family and the sanctity of slave marriages before God, even if not before the law. Instead, Caruthers found it more common that within a few years of marriage slaveholders “sold off” one spouse and sent them away “to a returnless distance.”\(^{138}\) Slave marriages that lasted into “advanced age,” he asserted were “‘like angels’ visits, few and far between.’”\(^{139}\)

Virginia Episcopalian Mary Blackford also decried the Southern establishment’s disregard for the sanctity of marriage and family, charging that slaveholders and slave traders showed a blatant disrespect for the Biblical decree “‘that what He hath joined man must not put asunder.’”\(^{140}\) Instead they deliberately sinned by separating husbands and wives who had


\(^{135}\) Ibid., 222. 503.


\(^{137}\) Ibid., 59.


\(^{139}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{140}\) Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, February 25, 1833, in Blackford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 44.
promised before God “to protect and care for” one another. This sin, Blackford concluded, was the result of an unjust system that allowed people to become commodities. “Property in human beings,” she believed, had corrupted Southern whites’ understanding of Christianity over time, and was the primary reason that the establishment failed to respect slave marriages as holy institutions. As a testament to the rampant “wickedness” afoot, Blackford pointed out the all too common irony of the holding cell for the local slave market standing in the shadow of the Presbyterian Church in the center of town.  

But perhaps the lack of recognition of, and protection for, black femininity upset Mary Blackford the most. In “Notes Illustrative of the Wrongs of Slavery,” she recognized that the commoditization of humans denied humanity and allowed white men to justify sexual assaults on slave women. These forced encounters, she realized, would have been odious crimes if committed against white women. Overlooking the human-constructed boundaries of race and status, Blackford held that a master’s expectation that a slave woman reciprocate unwanted sexual advances was a horrific show of disrespect for “female virtue” in general. Importantly, a slave owner’s ability to break “the conjugal tie . . . at any time” was an unholy direct assault on God-ordained unions between husbands and wives. North Carolina Quakers agreed, charging that the “iron hand of oppression” caused Southern whites to discount the “conjugal affection and matrimonial ties” of the black members of the “human family.” Not only did rape disrupt the slave family, but it also exhibited the philandering slaveowner’s inability to uphold his Christian responsibility to “protect and care” for the members of his own nuclear household.

141 Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, 1833, in Ibid., 41.
142 Ibid., 41.
143 Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, 1832, in Ibid., 39.
144 Ibid., 44.
146 Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, in Blackford, 1833, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 41, 44.
According to Blackford this “evil of our own creating” was indicative of how distanced white Southerners—many of which were “professors of religion”—had strayed from God. ¹⁴⁷

Fearing the worst, some dissenters warned that if whites did not repent for the sin of slavery, God, in due time, would send down his wrath on the nation. Presbyterian Eli Caruthers insisted that one must look no further than the Old Testament to appreciate God’s response to ongoing sin and worldly corruption. In “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders,” he asserted that “we have the authority of the Bible for holding up the calamitous events to the wicked actors in them as warnings.”¹⁴⁸ Likewise, when the cholera raged in Virginia in the 1830s, Episcopalian Mary Blackford supposed, as did the region’s slave population, that it “was a judgment from the Almighty for our sins . . . [of] holding them in Slavery.”¹⁴⁹ In 1848, the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends voiced related concerns, insisting that the antislavery work undertaken by generations of Southern Quakers was both religious and patriotic in nature. In their report on “the Subject of Slavery,” the Yearly Meeting pointed to an address written by Southern Quakers to the North Carolina General Assembly approximately fifty years prior. Claiming that a sense of Christian duty, a dedication to the Golden Rule, and an abiding love of country called them to action, the writers insisted that “it is righteousness which exalteth a nation,” but warned that “sin is a reproach to any people.” Therefore they implored their readers to consider that “such treatment of our fellow creatures [will] incur the displeasure of that God who is our common Father and the rightful dread of nations.”¹⁵⁰  

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 44. ¹⁴⁸ Bassett, Anti-Slavery Leaders in North Carolina, 57. ¹⁴⁹ Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, in Blackford, 1830s, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 45. ¹⁵⁰ Meeting for Sufferings, Proceedings of North Carolina Yearly Meeting on the Subject of Slavery, 17.
be solicited, than the recognition and discharge of those great duties which we all alike owe to the rights, the liberty and the happiness of our fellow creatures.”\footnote{151}

One way or the other, dissenters believed that God would eventually interject and bring about the demise of slavery. In an April 1861 letter to his brother, North Carolina Methodist Basil Armstrong Thomasson expressed his certainty that when “He sees fit in his wisdom and goodness to the human race to put an end to the institution of slavery there is no power on earth that can prolong its life one hour beyond the appointed time.”\footnote{152} In 1847, John Kline, a Virginia Dunkard, believed the nation would be “cleansed” of slavery, which he considered to be a “foul stain” on the country’s record. He predicted, rather accurately, a violent episode in which God would wash away the national sin “with blood.” Though a committed pacifist, he fervently hoped his “eyes might see that bright morning.”\footnote{153} Very similarly, in the 1840s Virginia Episcopalian Mary Blackford expressed her anticipation for the day when the Almighty would wipe the “dark Stain of Slavery” from her “beloved Country.”\footnote{154} Optimistic that the holy event was near, Blackford exclaimed “Thank God! That I am permitted to breathe the pure air of Heaven! . . . And may I live to see the time when the poor down trodden negro too shall enjoy this great privilege!”\footnote{155} Confident in slavery’s imminent demise, in the late 1850s Hinton Helper, the self-proclaimed voice of the Southern yeomanry, offered “thanks to heaven” that “the ‘peculiar institution’ has but a short . . . and inglorious existence before it.”\footnote{156} Every year, he insisted, “brings nearer the inevitable crisis. The sooner it comes the better; may heaven through our

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{151} Ibid., 25.  \\
\footnote{152} Basil A. Thomasson to “Brother,” April 1861, in North Carolina Yeoman, 350-351.  \\
\footnote{154} Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, “probably after 1840,” in Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 46-47.  \\
\footnote{155} Ibid.  \\
\footnote{156} Helper, The Impending Crisis, 27.  
\end{flushleft}
humble efforts, hasten its advent."\textsuperscript{157} In relation, in the 1850s, Daniel Worth, an upcountry-born Quaker who as an adult became a Wesleyan Methodist, believed “God’s grace” and “Divine approval” guided his antislavery work in the North Carolina Piedmont.\textsuperscript{158} Laboring under the auspices of the Almighty, Worth endeavored to accelerate the end of slavery in order to “make the world a little better, instead of worse.”\textsuperscript{159} Wesleyan Methodist Adam Crooks agreed, insisting that Wesleyans collectively believed that “the death warrant of American slavery is sealed in heaven, and the angel of mercy commissioned to execute it speedily.”\textsuperscript{160}

Antislavery Southerners mostly agreed that God would someday wash the nation of its sin. Yet they were not in consensus regarding the extent to which humans should mobilize to aid Providence in the meantime. Maintaining that the hand of God would rid the country of slavery at the appropriate hour, some saw little good in human intervention. In 1856, Joseph Waddell, a Shenandoah Valley Presbyterian, confided to his diary that “slavery itself is extremely repulsive to my feelings, and I earnestly desire its extinction everywhere.” Still, Waddell felt no affinity for Northern abolitionists which he viewed as “outside fanatics” who were impatiently attempting to take God’s work into their own hands. Although he “abhorred the institution,” he insisted that the “day for emancipation with us has not come . . . we must wait God's time.”\textsuperscript{161}

Other upcountry Protestants expressed similar misgivings regarding human agency in affecting emancipation. Basil Thomasson was morally and religiously opposed to slavery, yet he viewed abolitionists as agitators who exacerbated sectional divisions. Thus, folk Protestants such as Thomasson may have preferred to respect the “primitive” churches’ opposition to slavery

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{158} Daniel Worth “in prison” to Hon. Geo. W. Julian, February 6, 1860. Daniel Worth Papers, SHC.  
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{160} Crooks, \textit{Life of Rev. A. Crooks}, 27.  
\textsuperscript{161} Diary of Joseph Waddell, October 15, 1856 and December 31, 1865, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, University of Virginia: http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/AD1500. Diary entries make clear that Waddell was opposed to slavery. Ironically, however, as the publisher of the \textit{Staunton Spectator} Waddell presented a proslavery face to the public.
as professed by the denominational founders, but they ascertained that ridding the nation of the evil fell into the province of God rather than man. Dissenting Methodists in the Holston Conference, for instance, made clear to their brethren that they were morally opposed to the institution of slavery. But beyond church walls they rejected all accusations that they were abolitionists. In a world where sin abounded and Judgment loomed, Holston dissenters simply hoped to distance themselves from the corrupted mainstream by worshiping in a church unburdened by the sin of slavery, whether on the conference or local level. Ultimately, it is likely that Protestants like Thomasson and some Holston Methodists felt similarly to Joseph Waddell who “earnestly” prayed “for universal emancipation,” but believed “that God would bring it about in some way.”

But other antislavery whites held that God required human actors to put his Divine plan into motion. Presbyterian Eli Caruthers insisted that God’s order to Pharaoh to “let my people go” was an ongoing decree, and warned that if not obeyed, God would send down his wrath as he had in the Old Testament. Likewise, inspired by Christ’s command to “love thy neighbor,” upcountry Quakers—including Midwestern transplants of upcountry birth such as Levi and Catherine Coffin—dedicated themselves to helping fugitive slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Also out of a sense of Christian duty, Quakers such as Nereus Mendenhall and Wesleyan Methodists such as Daniel Worth coordinated efforts to distribute abolitionist tracts throughout the upcountry, including Hinton Helper’s *The Impending Crisis of the South*. Mendenhall and Worth additionally helped antislavery whites secure subscriptions to Northern newspapers with abolitionist leanings including *The New York Tribune* and *The True

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Wesleyan. It is likely that the family of Aquilla and Elizabeth Speer, devoted Methodists from the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina, were familiar with the *Tribune*, notoriously edited by abolitionist Horace Greely. Among the family’s surviving papers is a well-worn copy of *The Life of Horace Greely*, complete with underlines and margin comments exclaiming “True,” “good,” and “as it should.” Furthermore, despite her membership in the elite, Episcopalian Mary Blackford determined it to be her duty as a mother and a Christian to instruct her sons to honor God by actively opposing slavery. Blackford was appalled by fellow church members who lacked the “moral courage” to challenge the status quo. Moreover, Hinton R. Helper charged that the Southern yeomanry needed to assist the Divine by organizing in opposition to slavery and the unholy Southern slaveocracy. “Thank heaven,” he exclaimed, that God would see to it that, in time, his churches’ are “thoroughly abolitionized.” Meanwhile, however, Helper implored common whites to set the wheel in motion by rejecting the “satanic piety” of the South’s proslavery churches.

Like their Quaker neighbors, a number of non-Quakers left their upcountry communities to establish new homes in the “free soil” of the Midwest in the decades prior to the Civil War. In the 1850s, Hinton Helper and his friend Benjamin S. Hedrick, a fellow North Carolinian who spent his formative years in a neighboring foothill county, insisted that an aversion to slavery had forced thousands of Upper South natives to flee to the Midwest. In 1856 Hedrick supposed

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166 Diary of Mary B. M. Blackford, in Blackford, 1832, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 39.
167 Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 258.
168 Helper and Hedrick both point to the 1850 census to help substantiate their claims. Hedrick wrote that “if any one thinks that I speak without knowledge, let him refer to the last census. He will there find that in 1850 there were fifty-eight thousand native North Carolinians living in the free States of the West—thirty-three-thousand in Indiana alone. There were, at the same time, one hundred and eighty thousand Virginians living in the free States.” “Professor Hedrick’s Defense,” *North Carolina Standard*, October 4, 1856; also see Helper, *The Impending Crisis*, 304.
that approximately half of the family and friends he had come to know as a boy in Davidson County had relocated to “the free West.” Scoffing at insinuations that the common class embraced slavery, Hedrick rhetorically asked, “now, if these people were so much in love with the ‘institution,’ why did they not remain where they could enjoy its blessings?”\textsuperscript{169}

Of course, other antislavery whites remained in the South, but it is likely that many entertained the option of migrating to the Midwest. Though they never left the Yadkin Valley, as late as April 1861 Methodist Basil Thomasson and his brother were still discussing the possibility of “selling off” and relocating the entire Thomasson clan to “Indiana or Illinois.”\textsuperscript{170} Similarly, in the 1850s, Quakers Nereus and Oriana Mendenhall planned to join relatives in Minnesota. But as their departure date neared they had a change of heart. After consulting his conscience, Nereus concluded that “the Lord requires me to stay,” a decision which “satisfied” Oriana.\textsuperscript{171}

The Mendenhalls were not the sole recipients of a Divine call to remain in the South. In the 1850s Mary Blackford encouraged her son Launcelot “Lanty” Blackford, then a student at the University of Virginia, to relocate to a free state upon graduation. Lanty, however, concluded that God willed him to remain in the South where his antislavery activism would be more effective. Providence, he insisted, had strategically placed him “in the South where this slavery exists” and afforded him the opportunities of education and social rank which he anticipated would add sway to his antislavery claims.\textsuperscript{172} Thus fleeing the South would leave him

\textsuperscript{171} Hobbs, \textit{The Civil War and Reconstruction Through the Eyes of Mary Mendenhall Hobbs}, 14.
\textsuperscript{172} Launcelot Blackford [Charlottesville, VA] to Mary Blackford, January 15, [1852?], in Blackford, \textit{Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory}, 99-100.
unable to fulfill what he deemed as responsibilities to “my God, my country and my fellow men.”173 In a letter to his mother, Lanty explained:

*Here* I may alleviate their misery; *There* I could not, if I would. *Here*, seeing the evil before my eyes, I will ever be seeking to remedy it, and that with (at least to a moderate degree) the power of doing so. *There*, the evil being removed from my view would soon be forgotten, — and even if remembered, it would be but to mourn the loss of all power of remedy. . . . The Good Samaritan stopped and healed the wounds, not passing over to the other side as did the Levite with a pitying glance. The Missionary does not leave his post because he may be disgusted with the idolatry of the heathen around him. . . . Thus to fly would not be to choose that path when I could ‘loose the bonds of wickedness and let the oppressed go free!’ *I should free MYSELF of the evils of slavery but not the slaves!* 174

If an inner struggle existed in Lanty between his strong sense of elite Southern manhood and his willful adherence to a dissenting brand of antislavery Christianity, it is not evident. Far from being a social outsider, he stands as an example challenging the conceptions of the conservatism of elite Southern men in the antebellum era. Lanty, rather, seems to have taken pride in his identity as a young Virginia gentleman with a righteous “mission to perform.”175 Nevertheless, as a self-aware Southerner, he found few parallels between himself and Northern abolitionists. Horace Greely and Harriet Beecher Stowe, he charged, were “theoretical” philanthropists whose passive complaints ridiculed the South, but did little to affect reform. Instead, Lanty found more inspiration in William Wilberforce and other “real” philanthropists who he believed showed truer courage by placing themselves in the midst of injustice and actively struggling for change.176

Reverend Daniel Worth shared Lanty Blackford’s belief that slavery must be confronted head-on in the South. Born into an antislavery Quaker family in the North Carolina Piedmont, as

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173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
an adult Worth and his wife Elizabeth migrated to Randolph County, Indiana where he, and likely she, maintained an unshakeable aversion to slavery. Though “not religiously inclined in his earlier years,” he became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1830s. But in the 1840s his abolitionist principles influenced him to join the Wesleyan Methodist Church where he became a devoted missionary and activist, preaching the gospels of Jesus and abolition which he viewed as indistinguishable. In time, the “hand of Providence” encouraged Worth to seek an appointment in the “den of slavery,” and in 1858 he returned to Guilford County, North Carolina, his native community, where he preached “as strong and direct against slavery as ever you heard me in the north.” Like Lanty Blackford, Daniel Worth asserted that it was important for white Southerners to hear the abolitionist gospel from one of their own. Writing to his nephew in April 1858, Worth opined that an outsider would be unable to command an audience in North Carolina. He believed, however, that his “southern birth on the very spot where I preach,” carried clout among upcountry inhabitants. Though an expatriate of many years, Worth claimed kin and community in his native state, and possessed family ties to slavery that afforded him “an advantage” over other abolitionist missionaries. The “influential connectionship,” Worth explained to his nephew, included “cousins [who] are Slaveholders & are men of great popularity,” as well as “my wife’s very large relationship, and my general acquaintance with the old men of the country, and with the fathers of the young.”

Though most lacked Blackford’s and Worth’s devotion to activism, other antislavery whites in the Upper South shared similar sentiments regarding their Southern identity and

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177 Early inhabitants of Randolph County, Indiana were Quakers from Randolph County, North Carolina.
178 Tolbert, “Daniel Worth: Tar Heel Abolitionist,” 284
179 Ibid., 286.
180 Daniel Worth to Aaron Worth, April 1858; and Daniel Worth [New York] to “Dear Br.,” May 17, 1860, Daniel Worth Papers, SHC.
181 Daniel Worth to Aaron Worth, April 1858, Daniel Worth Papers, SHC.
182 Ibid.
attachment to place. Like Lanty Blackford, they found nothing inconsistent in being Southern, white, and opposed to slavery. In a heated debate with defenders of the institution, William Hurley, a Wesleyan Methodist and native North Carolinian, made it clear that he had no desire to leave Randolph County where “I was born and raised.”\textsuperscript{183} Similarly, despite her aversion to slavery, in 1867 folk Methodist Elizabeth Speer recalled that she had “never wanted to leave the ole South” during the antebellum years, particularly the Yadkin Valley community where her family had resided for generations.\textsuperscript{184} One additional incident underscores the Speer family’s complex identity as antislavery white Southerners. In their esteemed copy of \textit{The Life of Horace Greely}, daughter Jennie Speer wrote “an infamous lie!” beside a paragraph attacking Southern whites for their mental inferiority and collective support for slavery.\textsuperscript{185} Significantly, Jennie’s remark appears to be the only negative comment scribbled in the book’s heavily detailed margins.

Hinton Helper, too, made clear that he identified as a North Carolinian, and planned to remain among his neighbors in the South. In the \textit{Impending Crisis of the South} he described himself as:

\begin{quote}
a native of the South, born and bred in North Carolina, of a family whose home has been in the valley of the Yadkin for nearly a century and a half, a Southerner by instinct and by all the influences of thought, habits, and kindred, and with the desire and fixed purpose to reside permanently within the limits of the South, and with the expectation of dying there also.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

Rather than perceiving a conflict of interest, Helper claimed a Southern identity rooted in yeomen class consciousness that included an ardent opposition to slavery. He felt certain that

\textsuperscript{183} Crooks, \textit{Life of Rev. A. Crooks}, 92.
\textsuperscript{185} A. Speer and J. Speer, eds., \textit{Sisters of Providence}, 24.
\textsuperscript{186} Helper, \textit{The Impending Crisis}, 24-25.
most Southern yeomen who, like himself, had been “reared amidst the institution of slavery” were well aware of its “evil influences” and opposed it on both economic and moral grounds. Helper’s belief that the majority of Southern yeomen loathed slavery may have been a bit generous; however, documentation left by upcountry residents such as W.H. Younce from Ashe County, North Carolina indicates that his thesis was at least partially accurate. Writing in 1899, during the “nadir” of race relations in the nation, Younce remembered that “living in the midst of slavery, and daily observing the evils of the whole system, I had become thoroughly imbued with the anti-slavery doctrine and every day was more and more convinced in my own mind that it was wrong.”

In response, Hinton Helper demanded that Southern whites had a religious responsibility to become abolitionists. Though he used Christian accountability toward humankind to attack the morality of enslaving African Americans, Helper also contended that the religious battle went beyond the controversial ethics of holding people in bondage. Slavery, he argued in *The Impending Crisis of the South*, had stunted the South’s economic growth and kept many Southern whites poor. Therefore, appealing to the notion that the United States was a nation blessed by God, Helper implied that slavery sinfully hindered God’s will for a prosperous country. Perhaps worst of all, it kept common whites, the noblest of God’s citizens according to Helper, in a state of poverty with little hope for advancement. Therefore, he demanded, it was the religious responsibility of “every patriotic Southerner” to take up the cause of abolition in order to allow “our portion of the Union” to progress in step with the North. Using civil religion as a rallying cry, Helper insisted that the religious and secular slaveocracy, in their efforts to thwart Providence, were unpatriotic enemies of God. Overthrowing slavery was a holy mission

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that depended on a proactive Southern yeoman zealously bent on fulfilling their “duty” to God and country.

As a secular writer and activist, Hinton Helper likely never perceived of himself as a religious leader. Yet as *The Impending Crisis of the South* makes evident, Helper viewed the world through a religious lens. In common with many, perhaps most, nineteenth century Protestants, Helper possessed a Providential worldview that found deep religious meaning in events and the structures of the day. In relation, like American Christians, north and south, Helper accepted that a holy tether bounded the United States to the Divine. Embedded in patriotism was a religious responsibility to maintain a nation that would please the Almighty and ensure future blessings. But a threat to God’s chosen nation was an unholy assault on Providence. Continued displeasure would certainly result in chastisement, if not on earth in the form of Old Testament style plagues and natural disasters, then certainly in the world hereafter. What primarily separated antebellum Christians, however, were their different—and often opposing—conceptions of what constituted sin, religious responsibility, and God’s will. Each of these debates placed slavery front and center.

**Conclusion**

Slavery was at the root of religious conflict in antebellum America; yet it proved to be much more than a sectional debate. Rather than uniting the white South under a common brand of evangelical religion, internal disputes over slavery polarized the region and caused Southern Protestants to fragment into various and opposing camps. Particularly in the upcountry, opposition caused denominations to splinter, and allowed new churches to emerge. Disenchanted with the proslavery stance of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, antislavery whites in the North Carolina and Virginia hill country left the denomination and established their
own Wesleyan Methodist congregations. Though others maintained association with the dominant ecclesiastical structures, they practiced forms of folk Protestantism that respected the antislavery principles espoused by evangelicals decades earlier. Furthermore, the Quaker presence aided the survival of antislavery folk Protestantism in the upcountry. Religious and social cooperation, particularly apparent between Quakers and Methodists, allowed Friends to share their antislavery message with non-Quaker neighbors.

The splintering of Southern Protestantism over slavery illuminates a religious debate in the Upper South over “true” and “corrupt” churches. Historians have shown that nineteenth century Southerners respected denominational nuances. As Southerners chose to emphasize their similarities rather than their differences, interdenominationalism became a primary characteristic of religion in the region. Dissent on slavery, however, proved to be unacceptable. In the fall of 1851 a proslavery faction “rushed” a Wesleyan church service in Grayson County, Virginia. Charging the Wesleyans as heretics, the attackers “seized the Holy Bible used in the pulpit and tore the backs off it, and then taking a sharp knife cut its sacred pages in an X shape, and not content therewith, shot a hole through the Bible.”¹⁸⁹ The mob, which presumably consisted of “professors of religion,” did not define the event as a sacrilegious assault on Christ and his followers. Rather, perceiving themselves as the righteous, they were working in behalf of the Almighty, performing their Christian duty to cleanse his church, which they perceived had become corrupted by false doctrine and blasphemy. Any Bible used to preach against slavery, they believed, had been influenced by wickedness and was misleading white Southerners along a dangerous path of sin. The attack in Grayson County was a desperate measure to save misguided souls and protect a status quo assumed to be willed by God. Likewise, an incident in the North Carolina Piedmont further illustrates how differently proslavery and antislavery Southern

¹⁸⁹ Crooks, Life of Rev. A. Crooks, 74.
Protestants interpreted the Scripture and the message of Jesus. After a Wesleyan Methodist alluded to Christ as an antislavery activist, the magistrate of Randolph County retorted that he would expel Jesus from the county if he were to materialize in the form of an abolitionist.\(^{190}\)

Proslavery and antislavery whites may have interpreted Scripture differently, but were not so unalike in other regards. In fact, no single religious or social model characterizes Upper South antislavery whites as a whole. Though often referring to themselves as “poor,” dissenters often appear to have been members of average yeomen households who had received at least modest education.\(^{191}\) Though as the Blackford family indicates, Southern elites could and occasionally did stand against slavery. Antislavery whites also came from a variety of religious traditions. Beyond the region’s Quakers, who were unabashed opponents of slavery, Protestants including Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Separate Baptists, and Methodists of various stripes expressed an aversion to slavery.

Interestingly, Primitive Baptists, though numerous in the upcountry, are the only major denomination that did not stand out in the discourse over slavery. This could be due to several reasons. For one, Primitive Baptists often shied away from education, fearing that too much could compromise the religious experience. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that upcountry Primitive Baptists were not inclined to leave a written record. But also, Primitive Baptists who adhered to strict Calvinism imagined Providence’s hand in virtually all matters, and left little, if any, room for human agency. Unlike Methodists and others influenced by Arminianism—including Separate Baptists who advocated Sunday schools and missions—Primitive Baptists held that God had a plan for his creation that was impossible to sway. Therefore, it is likely that


\(^{191}\) Basil A. Thomasson and the Speers are prime examples. In addition to being a farmer, Thomasson worked as a schoolteacher. The Speer children, Ann, Jennie, and Asbury, attended nearby Jonesville Academy. Jennie also worked as a teacher.
Primitives accepted Providence’s hand in slavery more than their non-Calvinist neighbors. Certainly some may have viewed the institution as sinful, but they likely would have looked forward, arguing that God’s elect would be rewarded in heaven while sinners would suffer eternal hellfire.

Still, though progressive to an extent, little evidence suggests that Southern dissenters were advocates of racial equality. By most accounts, they were not. Though scholarship on antislavery Southerners is lacking, the earliest biographers of Hinton R. Helper paint him as a racist opportunist whose aversion to slavery grew out of his disdain for the slaveowning class and his zeal for yeomen equality. More recent work challenge this thesis, by showing that, apart from his economic opposition to slavery, Helper was also a moralist who was genuinely concerned about African Americans. Nevertheless, his “sensitivity” for African Americans aside, evidence suggests that Helper never hoped for black social, economic, or political equality. As products of their times, even the most dedicated reformers with the best of intentions operated within frameworks of paternalism, suggesting that reformers harbored conceptions of a racial hierarchy, even if not consciously realized.

Antislavery whites’ views on race could be inconsistent and at times contradictory. Episcopalian Mary Blackford was an advocate for slave education and a champion of black femininity. She also believed that whites and blacks should be equal before the law. However, she often, perhaps unintentionally, utilized language suggesting pity for “the poor down trodden negro” rather than support for universal equality. Southern Quakers, and those of Southern

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birth, were also conflicting and complex. It is probable that Levi and Catherine Coffin, as well as other Quaker activists who labored for justice on the grounds that the Bible never sanctioned social hierarchies, harbored relatively progressive racial views. However others, despite their aversion to slavery, were less progressive on race. In 1826 upcountry expatriate Samuel Charles stated that “the prejudice against a colored population, was as great in Indiana as in North Carolina, and that there was as much of it in the minds of members of our Society there as in other people, that they say as others do that they ought to be free, but they do not want them there.”

Suffice it to say, reformers too were products of their place and times. Even a faith-based opposition to slavery did not neatly translate into advocacy for racial equality in the antebellum era.

Of the dissenters analyzed, Eli Caruthers offered by far the most overt and progressive discourse on race. Caruthers, a Presbyterian and North Carolina native, argued that “assertions . . . respecting the inferiority of the blacks as a race . . . [are] contrary to Scripture, to reason & to facts.” The Bible, he demanded, offers no indication that an inferior race exists, but instead makes clear that “all had one Creator & have descended from the same parents.” In a plea rather extraordinary for a white Southerner of his time, Caruthers insists that if given a “fair chance,” including “the same advantages for improvement that you give your children,” African Americans would excel and prove the racial theory of the day incorrect.

Caruthers, however, was exceptional. More than likely other antebellum Southern whites shared his progressive sentiments on race, but they do not stand out in the written record. Still, individuals such as Eli Caruthers and Mary Blackford illustrate that the white South was far from

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195 Sherrill, Paul M. “Quakers and the North Carolina Manumission Society.” *Trinity College Historical Society Papers* 10 (1914): 36
196 “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders,” Eli W. Caruthers Papers, RL.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
united in mind. Southern whites as a whole did not rally together behind a banner of proslavery Evangelicalism. Rather a variety of Protestants, primarily in the upcountry, strayed from the Southern Orthodoxy. Here, antislavery Christians ranging from Quakers to Episcopalians expressed strikingly similar understandings of Scripture, Providence, and Christian duty that set them apart from the Southern Evangelical establishment, in turn making religious dissenters more similar than many likely realized. Countering the proslavery institution’s Biblical defense of slavery, they insisted that God had led the Israelites out of bondage in the Old Testament and that the institution of slavery countered Christ’s gospel of love made available to all in the New Testament. Anticipating God’s impending judgment, dissenters ranging from clergy, to lay members, to those without apparent denominational ties, psychologically distanced themselves from the South’s “corrupt” churches. While the proslavery clergy sanctified slaveholders, painting them as devout missionaries bringing the gospel to a desperate flock of heathens, dissenters held that slaveowners were sinners using a veil of piousness to mask their own immorality, selfishness, and fundamentally unchristian activities. While the religious and secular slaveocracy equated the “peculiar institution” with a holy mission to Christianize an inferior race, white dissenters held that God never extended authority to individuals to hold their spiritual equals in bondage.

Southern Protestantism would continue to splinter in the years ahead as the Civil War era introduced new opportunities for, and gave renewed significance to, religious dissent. As the Southern Orthodoxy mobilized behind the Confederacy, it distanced Upper South Unionists and other anti-Confederates who progressively withdrew military, political, and moral support for the Southern war. Like most Americans, Upper South anti-Confederates also viewed the Civil War through a religious lens. However, increasingly convinced of the religious and political
lege’s corruption, anti-Confederates defined secession and the Southern government in religious terms that were much different than those designed by their Confederate neighbors.
All the agency that God had in the matter was to permit these devils to enter into the Secessionists, just as He permitted them to enter the herd of swine and precipitate them into the Sea of Galilee!\(^1\)

CHAPTER III

“MINGLED MADNESS AND FOLLY”: RELIGIOUS DISSENT & SECESSION

On the eve of the Civil War, the Southern Orthodoxy transformed as it stepped forward to embrace disunion and the Confederate cause. As it had for the previous thirty years, the religious establishment continued to advocate the righteousness of slavery and the white South. At the same time, however, mainline churches shifted much of their focus to sanctifying secession. Defining it as a holy mission, disunion, they charged, was necessary to preserve a blessed national ideal and Southern institutions ordained by the Almighty. Importantly though, as in the past, the Southern Orthodoxy failed to achieve comprehensive support in the Upper South, portions of the upcountry in particular. Here, a variety of Protestants ranging from Moravians to Episcopalians espoused alternative religious interpretations of secession that stood in stark contrast to those put forth by the Southern Evangelical clergy and their supporters. As the discourse within the South illustrates, political disagreements during the secession crisis were laced with religious undertones and implications. While the Southern mainstream urged that secession and the formation of the Southern Confederacy were Providential, Unionists declared that disunion was human folly in its most dangerous form, an odious crime against God that

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would enrage rather than please him. In the process, opposition to secession exposed fundamental religious differences and caused Southern Protestantism to fissure further.

Secession and the subsequent process of mobilizing for war introduced new opportunities for dissent in the South. Unlike their Lower South brethren who were becoming progressively outspoken in their calls for disunion, most white residents of the Upper South held fast to their Unionist principles over the course of the Secession Winter of 1860-1861. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for secession skyrocketed in the region, practically overnight, following President Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation of April 15, 1861 which called for 75,000 troops to suppress the rebellion in South Carolina. Suddenly many former Unionists shifted to support the Confederacy. In many cases, their devotion was halfhearted, resting on a perceived need to protect their homes and families from a potential army of invaders rather than on any real sense of Confederate nationalism. Consequently, many upcountry residents, particularly common whites who eventually found that they had no interest in a Confederate victory, would revert to Unionism as war weariness and disaffection gradually set in. For now, however, a number of unconditional Unionists resisted the secessionist tide that swept through the Upper South in the late spring of 1861. While a variety of motives, including for some an opposition to slavery, kept unconditional Unionists’ from submitting to the Southern Confederacy, as a collective they regularly framed their arguments against secession in religious terms.

Unconditional Unionism did not spring from a single well. Antislavery principles encouraged some upcountry residents, though not most, to support the Union following secession. A faith-based commitment to antislavery contributed to the persistent Unionism of many Quakers, as well as Wesleyan Methodists including members of the Hulin family of
Montgomery County, North Carolina. Other upcountry Protestants also claimed that their Unionism derived, at least in part, from an aversion to slavery. William H. Younce was the youngest son in a modest yeoman family from Ashe County, North Carolina. At nineteen years of age in 1861, he admittedly had little interest in the politics of the day. Yet, he developed a marked anti-Confederate spirit early on that eventually encouraged him to flee to East Tennessee where he enlisted in a Federal regiment. In later years, Younce insisted that it was his moral opposition to slavery that guided his Unionism. As a Southerner “daily observing the evils of the whole system,” Younce remembered that he “had become thoroughly imbued with the anti-slavery doctrine.” Though tempted to enlist upon seeing his friends “proudly marching to the war in a blaze of glory,” after consulting with “Divine Providence” he concluded in 1861 that the Southern effort was an “unworthy cause.”

Still, white Southerners who retained their Unionism after April 15 were, for the most part, not antislavery activists, William Younce likely included. Perhaps many were like North Carolinian Bryan Tyson who, despite considering himself “the black man’s friend” and “not a pro-slavery man,” was relatively indifferent to the future of slavery. Demonstrating his lack of concern, as well as his uncertainty of how to rectify slavery with his Christian faith, in 1862 he commented that “whether or not it be right and consistent with the will of Almighty God to own

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slaves, I am unable at present to tell.”\(^5\) Instead, an opposition to Southern radicalism, not a devotion to antislavery activism, solidified Tyson’s Unionism and caused him to later urge that “it was our politicians rather than the masses of the people that seceded.”\(^6\)

Unionists, regardless of their stance on slavery, often voiced their opposition to the “dangerous fanatic[s]” at work on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line.\(^7\) More particularly, they blamed Northern Abolitionists and Southern Fire-eaters alike for exacerbating sectional tensions and tearing the country apart. Writing to a friend in May 1861, Jonathan Worth, a North Carolina politician with Quaker leanings, complained that “I abhor the Northern Abolitionist and the Southern Secessionist, both co-operating with different objects, to break up the Union.”\(^8\) In another letter only eight days later, Worth insisted that “Abolitionism and Secession were the only Commanders in the field—both . . . moved and instigated by the Devil.”\(^9\) Similarly, William G. Brownlow of East Tennessee, an unabashed Unionist and advocate of slavery, routinely charged the “wicked leaders of Abolitionism and the equally ungodly advocates of Secessionism” for stirring up the animosity which eventually led to disunion and war.\(^10\) Though

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\(^5\) Bryan Tyson, *A Ray of Light, or, a Treatise on the Sectional Troubles, Religiously and Morally Considered* (Brower’s Mill, N.C.: Published by the Author, 1862), 42.

\(^6\) Tyson, *Object of the Administration in Prosecuting the War*, 8.


\(^8\) Jonathan Worth [Randolph County, N.C.] to Gaius Winningham, May 20, 1861, in J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, Vol. I (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1909), 149. Worth was a “birthright” Quaker (i.e., he was born to Quaker parents). He never claimed membership in the Society of Friends, but continued to reside in the Quaker community of his birth throughout his adult life. Worth lived close to Quaker principles, and according to historian J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, was “personally very devout” despite his lack of official association with the Quaker church. It should be noted that despite his ardent prewar Unionism, Worth was not an unconditional Unionist. He very reluctantly followed North Carolina out of the Union, and despite serving as State Treasurer he rarely hid his Unionist leanings. He was highly critical of secession and the Confederacy throughout the Civil War era. Hamilton, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, Vol. I, viii; “Jonathan Worth,” NorthCarolinahistory.org: An Online Encyclopedia, North Carolina History Project, http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/517/entry (accessed March 15, 2012);


a religious and political leader throughout much of the nineteenth century, “Parson” Brownlow hailed from common upcountry stock. Born “poor” in Wythe County, Virginia in 1805, Brownlow later traveled throughout central Appalachia as a Methodist circuit rider in the Holston Conference, before settling in East Tennessee in the 1830s where he made a career of blending Methodist religion and anti-Democratic Party politics as the editor of Brownlow’s Whig, as well as other partisan papers in the years that followed.11

Similarly, John Minor Botts, a Virginia politician and slaveholder, agreed with Worth, Brownlow, and others that Northern and Southern “fanatics” were to blame for the national crisis. Botts conceded that abolitionists such as “Garrison, Parker, [and] Beecher . . . and all that class of extreme or radical men” fanned the flame of secession. However, he demanded that “Jeff. Davis . . . and company” were the primary “architects of mischief and ruin.”12 Alluding to the secessionist leadership, Botts rhetorically asked, “Did Heaven in its wrath ever raise up such a set to delude, cheat, and destroy a sensible people before in the history of the world?”13 Like Brownlow, Botts was a former Whig and a outspoken critic of the Democratic Party, who became known—revered by some, yet criticized by others—for his consistent loyalty to the United States during the Civil War.

Though Botts and Brownlow, and perhaps Tyson to a lesser extent, were public figures, they were not extraordinarily different from ground level Unionists who were expressing similar sentiments. Referring to abolitionists and secessionists alike, William Evans of Greenville, Tennessee recognized that “two evils” were at play in the nation. Yet, at the end of the day

13 Ibid.
Evans’s determination to “do right” precluded him from supporting disunion. Though “principle” kept him from embracing secession, he felt compelled to make clear to family members in North Carolina that he was no fanatic. In September 1861 he informed “Cousin Mollie” that “I delight in being called a Union man, [but] it must not be understood that I favor union with Abolitionism, or any thing else of the kind.”\textsuperscript{14} At the same time, Thomas T. Johnston of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina was an unwavering Unionist. An elder in Paw Creek Presbyterian Church and a slaveholder to boot, Johnston boasted that he “espoused the cause in 59 and 60” and continued to do so following the Raleigh government’s decision to secede after Lincoln’s call for North Carolina militia on April 15, 1861. Rather than interpreting Lincoln’s proclamation as a call to arms, Johnston interpreted disunion as a course that would “free the negro and ruin the country.”\textsuperscript{15} Like John Minor Botts, Johnston loathed secessionist politicians whose radicalism he perceived as a threat to his “property.”

Despite the diversity of their social and denominational backgrounds, as well as the multitude of reasons that influenced their Unionism, upcountry Unionists virtually across the board mixed the civil with the sacred and framed their political dissent in nearly identical religious terms. Though their arguments found renewed significance during the secession crisis, the basis for their appeals was nothing new. In the decades following Independence and the Great Awakenings, Americans blended nationalism and Protestantism into an American civil religion rooted firmly in a belief that the United States was a nation ordained by God and consecrated by the blood of their forefathers. In the nineteenth century American mind, worshiping at duel alters—that of the nation and that of the Almighty—was hardly incompatible;

\textsuperscript{14} William Evans [Greenville, TN] to “Cousin Mollie [Cleveland County, N.C.], September 6, 1861, Mary Ann Covington Wilson Papers, SHC.
\textsuperscript{15} Thomas T. Johnston [Mecklenburg County, N.C.] to John J. Lawling [probably Tennessee], December 21, 1865, Marie Elliot McClure Collection, NCDAH.
rather, the civil and the spiritual melded together, in effect becoming extensions of one another.

As God and country intermeshed, patriotism became an integral component of one’s Christian devotion. Therefore, secession, according to Unionists, was a blasphemy against God and the nation he bequeathed to his chosen people. Disunionists, too, adhered to the national religion and found the Spirit of ’76 to be a holy mustering call. Yet Secessionists and Unionists interpreted their Christian duty to God and country differently. Believing that Northern “fanatics,” be it abolitionists, politicians, or preachers, were on the verge of overturning the nation as designed by Providence, Secessionists perceived of themselves as saintly redeemers who would reestablish their Christian nation via separation from the misguided. However, Unionists ardently disagreed, charging that any attempt to dissolve God’s blessed nation was a treasonous ploy headed by Satan.

Expressing their religious devotion to the nation, Upper South Unionists, regardless of social station or denominational background, held faith that God would guide his nation through the worsening times. In 1856, *North Carolina Standard* editor William Woods Holden admitted to a friend that “I verily believe that *Almighty God* takes care of this Republic.” Reflecting the sentiments of many, Holden supposed that the “Providence of God [had] . . . guided and shielded Washington” during the years of the American Revolution in order to establish a model Christian

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nation on earth. To ensure that the “work of the immortals of ’76” was not “blasted and destroyed,” Holden was sure that “millions” of Americans, exhibiting a “spirit of the loftiest patriotism,” were sending forth their “earnest prayers.” Similarly, in November 1860 Virginian John M. Botts confidently wrote of his “abiding trust” that “the same Good Spirit that has directed us” thus far will “save the great, glorious, thrice-blessed, and God-like work of our Fathers to us, and to our children and to our children's children.”

Unionists continued to appeal to the civil religion as the national mood grew darker in late 1860 and 1861. As the secession crisis neared its crescendo, Basil Armstrong Thomasson, a Yadkin Valley yeomen and devout Methodist, lamented the “gloomy times” befalling the nation. On March 31, 1861 he questioned how “this glorious union—the price of the blood of our fathers” could be “abandoned as a thing of no worth.” Writing in his diary, Thomasson silently implored his fellow Americans to “‘Never give up the ship. ’ Never! Never!” In Virginia, fearing the worst, Episcopalian Mary Blackford appeared to be sinking into despair and depression. Above all she could not bear the prospect of her sons rallying against “our own ‘Star spangled banner,’ and in such a cause.” She explained to her cousin John Minor, that the prospect of Virginia leaving the United States “is a sorrow that makes me feel that the grave is the only place for me. You did not know, my dear John, the pains I took to train my five sons in sentiments of patriotism.” Around the same time, Joseph Eggleston Segar, a United States Congressman from Virginia pled before Virginia’s leaders to “in God’s name . . . not take

disunion ‘by the forelock.”’ Secessionists’ “hellish purposes,” he charged, were to disrupt the work of the Founding Fathers for their own personal gain. This self-serving “class” was willing to “fire the very temples of liberty . . . the handiwork of Washington” and “destroy the best government that man was ever blessed with.”

Quite right, Segar warned that “this class does exist in Virginia.” Expressing similar concerns, prewar Unionists in Surry County, North Carolina resolved that Lincoln’s election was not “sufficient cause for the dismemberment of the best government vouchsafed by God to man” and hoped that “through the patriotism of the people, peace and harmony may be restored to the country and the bonds of our national Union preserved.”

Christian patriotism took on an even deeper significance following the firing on Fort Sumter. At this point, Unionism in the Upper South quickly declined, yet it did not disappear entirely. Consequently, unconditional Unionists who maintained their political loyalty to the United States began professing their religious message with a newfound fervor after mid-April 1861. Virginian John Minor Botts refused to submit to Secessionists’ pressures, claiming that he had “made the Union the god of my idolatry on earth.” In May 1861, Botts still prayed “for the preservation of the work of our national Father,” George Washington. Proclaiming that “Providence gave him to America for the benefit of mankind throughout the world,” Botts appealed to a widely shared belief in the United States that God’s blessing required courageous leadership and a devoted citizenry to build a shining example for the world to follow. With the


22 Segar, Speech of Joseph Segar, Esq., of Virginia, March the 30th, 1861, 10.

Union divided, Botts proclaimed that Washington “will have lived for nothing,” and the country will have failed in its holy mission. 

Therefore, those who retained their Unionist principles after mid-April 1861 interpreted the secessionist threat to the nation as an act of aggression toward God. One’s political loyalty indicated, according to William Brownlow, if they were “faithful” servants of God or “faithless” pretenders. Comparing Secessionists to “the beasts of Ephesus” that the Apostle Paul battled in First Corinthians, Brownlow proclaimed that the devout “would not desert the flag of our fathers, the Union, and the Constitution. These had protected us for years; and we won’t give them up for the world or the devil!” Similarly, Edward Carter Turner a planter, Episcopal vestryman, and unconditional Unionist in Fauquier County, Virginia insisted that secession amounted to a “holy horror” orchestrated by “a party destitute entirely of virtue, principle or patriotism.” He chose to remain bound “to the union as our fathers made it” 

In turn, upcountry residents who persisted in their Unionism after the firing on Fort Sumter demanded that Christians had a religious duty to support the federal government. East Tennessee Methodist minister, William “Parson” Brownlow, asserted in 1862 that “uncompromising devotion to the American Union” was “a simple duty both of religion and patriotism.” In the heat of the secession crisis two years earlier, Brownlow demanded that Protestant clergy in the South, particularly Methodists, should, “from a Christian stand-point[,] speak out in thunder tones” against secession. Likewise, Thomas Humes, an Episcopal

24 “John M. Botts to an undisclosed recipient, likely May 1861, in John Minor Botts, The Great Rebellion, 225 & 278.
25 Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession, 5-6.
26 Ibid., 438-439.
28 Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession, 5-6.
minister and Knoxville loyalist insisted the patriotism was, in effect, the eleventh Commandment. East Tennessee Unionists, he believed, viewed their patriotic duty to “to be ‘no less imperative than any commandment in the second table,’” and perhaps as important as any of God’s laws revealed in the Ten Commandments.30 On a similar note, in April 1861 Virginian John M. Botts “prayed as I never prayed before for wisdom and strength to do my duty” to God and country, and hoped “in the name of liberty, humanity and Christianity” the Union would be restored.31 Botts’s “duty” as a Protestant patriot precluded him from rebelling against “the best Government . . . with which man was ever blessed . . . a Union that I have been taught and accustomed to adore.”32 Alexander Hamilton Jones, a yeoman in the mountains near Asheville, North Carolina expressed a related sense of duty. “Taught to love the Union next to my God” from an early age, Jones maintained his loyalty to the United States after April 1861 despite being “dubbed by the disorganizers an abolitionist, a Tory, a Lincolnite, &c.”33

Upcountry Unionists found that Scripture supported their ongoing devotion to the federal government. Some even urged that Christ had exhibited a patriotic spirit that Southerners should mimic. Episcopalian minister Thomas Humes insisted that “the Author of Christianity cherished that sentiment [patriotism] in its purity.” According to Humes, Jesus’ “love of country”—particularly “His own of Israel” but respect for others nations as well—can be inferred from the statement “he loveth our nation” found in Luke 7:5.34 In relation, Parson Brownlow asserted that Jesus refused to support political rebellion. Most particularly, Brownlow argued that Jesus

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32 Ibid.
steered “Roman Empire slaves” away from “rebellion and insurrection,” encouraging them instead to submit to their earthly masters.\(^{35}\) Singling out members of his own denomination once again, Brownlow declared that Southern Methodists should be aware that the Bible “require[es] loyalty to the civil Government . . . and a devotion to a country that forbids their assenting to its overthrow, directly or indirectly!”\(^{36}\)

However, of all upcountry Protestants, perhaps Anabaptists took most seriously the Apostle Paul’s Biblical recommendation in Romans 13 that believers should submit to the established authority on earth. As Shenandoah Valley Dunkard elder John Kline wrote in January 1861, “We teach and are taught obedience to the ‘powers that be;’ believing . . . that ‘the powers that be are ordained of God.’”\(^{37}\) Additionally, like other Protestants, Anabaptists respected the American civil religion, albeit in a distinctive fashion. As pacifists, they were not inclined to sacralize the American Revolution. But this did not preclude their insistence that the United States was an “inseparable” nation with a holy mission, namely the responsibility of demonstrating to others that government and “Divine Word” can coexist. In January 1861, Elder Kline wrote in his diary that the federal government “has proved itself to be of incalculable worth to its citizens and the world, and therefore we, as a church and people, are heart and soul opposed to any move which looks toward its dismemberment.”\(^{38}\)

Southerners who held fast to the Union during the secession crisis, individuals such as John Kline and Basil A. Thomasson, found religious meaning in their choice. While a variety of secular factors may have influenced their politics, upcountry Unionists used religious imagery to


\(^{36}\) Ibid.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
lend credence to their dissent. Importantly, as William Brownlow understood, Protestant religion provided a nearly universal platform for the discourse over loyalty to take place. Appealing to a uniquely American strain of Protestantism that blended the scriptural and the civil, Unionists charged that the Almighty had bestowed upon Christian patriots the duty of upholding his chosen nation. Viewed in this light, upcountry Unionists were unable to accept the Southern Orthodoxy’s claim that secession was a holy mission directed by God. To the contrary, to Unionists, Secessionists appeared to be bent on wresting the helm of the nation away from the hands of Divine Providence.

_Folly_

“The most accursed, the most flagitious, the most stupendous, and the most atrocious crime that in my opinion has been committed since the day that Jesus Christ was crucified.”

Like other Americans in the nineteenth century, Upcountry Protestants viewed the world through a Providential lens. Regardless of race, religious creed, or geographic location, Americans operated within a religiously-sensitive intellectual framework that allowed them to sense God’s hand regularly extending from Heaven to earth. Most would have agreed that humans enjoyed freewill; however, few would have denied the Almighty’s ability to gently guide his people as they moved forward in their daily lives. Also, Americans found religious significance in the world which surrounded them. Individuals, north and south, black and white, commonly accepted that the events of the day were part of God’s overall plan. As historians including George C. Rable have argued, Americans, virtually across the board, found that the

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39 John M. Botts to “friend,” January 22, 1864, in Botts, _The Great Rebellion_, 314.
Divine inspired secession and the war that followed. Yet, Upper South Unionists did not. Finding disunion to be inconsistent with their scriptural and civil religion, Unionists urged that secession and civil war were in no way part of a holy plan. White Northerners, Southern Secessionists, and most blacks may have espoused their own distinctive Providential interpretations of the events unfolding. In contrast, however, Upper South Unionists insisted that secession and the mobilization of troops was sheer human “folly.”

Upper South Unionists sensed the impending “folly” even before South Carolina left the Union in December 1860. As early as May 1860, North Carolina Standard editor William Woods Holden wrote to a friend that “God forbid that . . . our own blindness, prejudice and folly should ever compel us” to leave the Union. Yet, residents of the Upper South anxiously waited as the 1860 presidential election approached. Following Lincoln’s election in November, Virginian John M. Botts feared that Southern Fire-eaters, particularly in South Carolina which he referred to as “the most spoiled child of the whole family,” would eventually “pull down this great temple of liberty on their own heads.” However, he made clear that if Southern secessionists “overthrow” the government, “no part of the folly, the wickedness, or the crime, shall be charged upon me.” John B. Minor, an Episcopalian in Charlottesville, expressed

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40 For instance, African American often interpreted the Civil War as their long awaited deliverance from bondage even before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. At the same time, white Northerners viewed their struggle as a holy attempt to prevent God’s Union from being torn asunder. Secessionists also insisted that their work fell within the domain of Providence, albeit much differently than white Northerners and African Americans. Charging that misguided Northerners were forcing the nation to stray from the course that God outlined, Secessionists confidently assumed that Providence appreciated their conservatism and guided their effort to maintain his Holy plan via separation. For a more in-depth presentation of these arguments see Curtis D. Johnson, Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); and George C. Rable, God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).


43 Ibid.
similar sentiments, also blaming “wretched little South Carolina” for the “mingled madness and folly” befalling the country in late 1860.\textsuperscript{44}

Accusations that human agents, rather than Divine Providence, were leading the nation down a destructive path ramped up after April 15, 1861. On April 29, Yadkin Valley yeoman and Methodist, Basil A. Thomasson, exclaimed, “The South against the North! What folly!”\textsuperscript{45} Similarly, writing to a friend on May 30, birthright Quaker Jonathan Worth, insisted that the present “folly . . . exceeds anything in modern history.”\textsuperscript{46} Those opposed to secession insisted that secular enthusiasm and zeal had supplanted rational and faith. Dunkard elder John Kline believed that a “wave of human passion” had led to a “great commotion everywhere” following Lincoln’s call for troops.\textsuperscript{47} Similarly, on April 19, John M. Botts described secession as “the most egregious error that man, in his hour of madness, ever committed.” Alluding to the American civil religion, he feared that this “fatal heresy” would have damning consequences for “our blessed Union” if “reason, order, law, liberty, morality, and religion” did not supplant the ungodly “passion, pride, prejudice, hatred, [and] disorder” currently at play.\textsuperscript{48}

As the Upper South states began making motions to secede, Unionists insisted that Disunionists were acting hastily and without the sanction of the Almighty. Alexander Jones near Asheville also interpreted secession as a human blunder. Following Lincoln’s April 15 proclamation, Jones recalled that the “original secessionists” in his neighborhood quickly worked “to excite the people to the highest point.”\textsuperscript{49} As war fever swept Buncombe County in late

\textsuperscript{44} John B. Minor to William M. Minor, likely December 1860 or January 1861, in Blackford, \textit{Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory}, 147.
\textsuperscript{49} Jones, \textit{Knocking at the Door}, 4.
spring 1861, Jones “could do nothing more . . . than to think to myself, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.””

In relation, Thomas Thompson, an elder at Paw Creek Presbyterian Church near Charlotte, remembered that the overnight push for secession “looked like hurrying a drove of cattle into a dangerous stream . . . [with] no place to get out at.”

Still, Unionists awaited God’s intervention. “Madness,” “passion,” and “folly” may have temporarily deluded the people of the South, but Protestant Unionists never doubted that God was present and could take the reins at any moment to save his nation. In January 1861, John B. Minor wrote to his depressed cousin, Mary Blackford, that “human folly, pride and wickedness” cannot stand forever, and urged her to take “comfort” in the “assurance that ‘the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.’” Similarly, in an August 1 letter to a friend, Jonathan Worth hoped that “when Wickedness and Folly . . . have finished their carnival, that Providence will bring good out of the miseries new impending.” Others, however, were more pessimistic. In May 1861, Thomas Macon of Randolph County, North Carolina prayed that the “superintending Providence of God” would intervene to “save the ship from the rocks,” but admitted that “it seems gone.”

In the Shenandoah Valley, Unionist Julia Chase was equally disheartened. On July 27, she confided to her diary that “Our skies are very dark. . . . unless God interposes, I fear that this [United States] Government will not be able to maintain itself.”

The secession crisis and opening of the Civil War transformed a long-running national discourse over God’s will for his “blessed” Union into a debate over the extent of Providence’s

50 Ibid.
51 Thomas T. Johnston [Mecklenburg County, N.C.] to John J. Lawling [probably Tennessee], December 21, 1865. Marie Elliot McClure Collection, NCDAH.
52 John B. Minor to Mary B. M. Blackford, January 21, 1861, in Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 148-149.
54 Thomas Macon [Randolph County, N.C.] to Jonathan Worth, May 6, 1861, in Ibid., 158.
involvement in the affairs of his “chosen” people. White Northerners, Southern Secessionists, and African Americans on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line interpreted the events of the day as part of the Almighty’s overall plan. Yet, in contrast, white Unionists doubted that God’s hand was ushering the breakup of the nation. Importantly, Unionists never abandoned their Providential religious outlook—they faithfully awaited intervention and would find Providential meaning in the war it pressed on—but disunion and fratricide convinced many that human agents were at the helm of the Southern Confederacy, not God. Though accusations of “folly” did not disappear, the rhetoric transformed as the war progressed, taking on an even darker tone as will be analyzed later.

It is worthy to point out that Primitive Baptists, a denomination that was heavily represented in the upcountry, were absent, or at least not evident, in the discourse over human folly. Quite possibly their absence was for the same reasons that they did not often appear in discussions over the legitimacy and morality of slavery. Most specifically, their Calvinistic brand of religion likely posed a problem for Primitives who disagreed with the war politically, but were required by the dictates of their faith to accept God’s hand in all events. If so, their Calvinism would have rendered the “folly” thesis, for them, a moot point. At the same time, it is possible that Primitive Baptists collectively embraced secession and war in April 1861, a choice that would have excused them from this religious conundrum entirely. Yet, this is unlikely considering evidence of Primitive Baptist Unionism that will be analyzed in the following chapter. More likely, Primitive Baptist Unionists and other Calvinists who opposed the Southern Confederacy continued to trudge “through this low ground of sorrow” as they previously had,
accepting that God’s plan was indiscernible and that the elect would be rewarded in Heaven, an argument that would come front and center in the latter portion of the war.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Anti-Confederate Protestantism}

The secession crisis and Civil War offered new opportunities for Protestant dissent as irreconcilable political differences forced Southerners to become more religiously divided. The Southern Orthodoxy transformed during the Civil War era into a pro-Confederate conglomerate. Determined to give religious meaning to the Southern war effort, they deemed it a holy cause. But other Protestants in the Upper South, largely in the upcountry where religious dissent had been a longstanding tradition, rejected the establishment’s advocacy for the Confederacy, particularly its religious justifications for secession which they viewed as inherently blasphemous. As a result, a distinctive brand of anti-Confederate Protestantism emerged in the region which was specifically Southern, yet fundamentally at odds with the pro-Confederate religious mainstream. Individuals from a variety of denominational backgrounds would eventually express similar sentiments; however, Unionist Methodists from the upcountry were the most vocal anti-Confederate Protestants early on.

Mirroring the region’s secular climate, the religious establishment in the Upper South did not turn to support secession until mid-April 1861. Nevertheless, in the interim leading up to the Presidential election of 1860, outspoken Unionist clergy members such as East Tennessee Methodist minister, William Brownlow, began charging Disunionists in the “Cotton States” with religious treason. In October of that year, Brownlow attacked the secular and religious leadership of the Lower South, or the “Breckenridge unbelievers” as he termed them. Drawing

\textsuperscript{56} Quoted from King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Richmond”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County], May 29, 1864, in Hester Bartlett Jackson, ed., \textit{Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War} (Charlotte: Delmar Printing, 1992), 277.
parallels between the Nullification Crisis of 1832 and the looming secession crisis, in the October 13, 1860 edition of the *Knoxville Whig*, Brownlow warned Southerners that:

In the garden of Eden, our first parents were induced by the devil, in the form of a serpent, to *nullify* the laws of God; and, believing it to be a ‘peaceful remedy,’ they made the dreadful ‘experiment.’ Cain, in the case of Abel, *nullified* the law of God; and he was branded in the forehead as a traitorous murder. The nation of Jews who perished in the siege of Jerusalem were all *nullifiers*. So were the rebellious inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the antediluvians, for their *South-Carolina politics*, encountered the very devil, in the days of the Flood. And the King of Egypt, in trying to carry his ‘Ordinance’ into effect, lost his life in the Red Sea. And had the South Carolina Nullifiers gone a little further with their scheme of secession, Old Hickory Jackson would have drowned them in the harbor of Charleston. . . . And, by way of admonition to all Disunionists, I conclude this epistle in the language of Holy Writ: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained by God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves DAMNATION.’

The “Fighting Parson’s” tone hardly changed following Lincoln’s election and South Carolina’s threat to secede. On December 8, 1860, Brownlow ridiculed “the clergy of South Carolina” for lacking patriotism and the “courage of their Master.”

Brownlow’s religious attacks became more urgent as the secession crisis worsened during the winter and spring of 1861 and turned to war that summer. As the Upper South rallied behind the Confederacy and the Southern Orthodoxy that sacralized it, Brownlow chided “reverend traitors” who turned their backs on God and country, and “disgrace[d] their pulpits on Sunday by delivering inflammatory stump-speeches, under the pretense of preaching Christ to the people.” Brownlow was especially angered that Southern clergymen such as Reverend Harrison, the minister at First Presbyterian in Knoxville, turned their false doctrine into Confederate propaganda, often making blatantly false claims for the dual purposes of

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58 Ibid., 45-46.
59 Ibid., 146-147.
heightening enthusiasm for the Southern cause and increasing animosity toward the North. For instance, Brownlow scoffed at Harrison’s pronouncement to his congregation that “Jesus Christ was a Southern, born on Southern soil, and so were His apostles, except Judas, whom he denominated a Northern man!”60 Brownlow, furthermore, decried Reverend Harrison’s insistence that “he would sooner have a Bible printed and bound in hell, than one printed and bound north of Mason & Dixon’s line!”61

William Brownlow and other anti-Confederate Protestants were especially offended that the mainstream clergy in the South had the audacity to appeal to God for assistance in their cause. In 1862 the Methodist Parson pointed out that instead of preaching “the gospel of peace, they have been for twelve months preaching war, bloodshed, and plunder”62 That same year, Bryan Tyson, a Unionist in the North Carolina Piedmont, echoed Brownlow’s sentiments, insisting that pro-war prayers made a “mockery” of Christ’s message of love. Tyson, who never aligned with a particular denomination, could not comprehend how Christians could “expect Him to give us success in spilling the blood of our fellow man.”63 Likewise, in Virginia, John M. Botts criticized Confederates who “impiously implore the Almighty” to assist them in a war of their own making.”64 As pacifists, upcountry Quakers and Moravians iterated similar sentiments. Believing war to be contrary to Christ’s gospel, Quakers such as Isham Cox and John E. Pretlow, actively asserted that Christians should advocate peace.65 Moravians including Solomon Hege often attempted to honor their denomination’s dwindling heritage of pacifism, particularly as the war pressed on and disaffection set in. In March 1863, Hege wrote to his son,

60 Ibid., 143.  
61 Ibid., 143.  
62 Ibid., 393.  
63 Tyson, A Ray of Light, 51.  
64 Botts, The Great Rebellion, 224-225.  
65 “A brief account of the life and travels of Isham Cox, Written by himself,” Isham Cox Papers; Memoir of John E. Pretlow, John E. Pretlow Paper, FHC.
a reluctant conscript then in Confederate service, that the war was “contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which breathes love and peace to all mankind.\textsuperscript{66} A few months later, Hege, hoped that God would “soon interpose” to overturn the “folly . . . of the men in authority.”\textsuperscript{67}

Upcountry churches as a whole did not immediately turn to embrace the Confederate cause, even as war fever swept the entire South following Lincoln’s proclamation of April 15, 1861. As North Carolina was mobilizing troops and scheduling its departure from the Union, Reverend Dodson at Zion Methodist Church in the Yadkin Valley warned his congregation of the “dread of war” and insisted that “peace should be kept.”\textsuperscript{68} While it is still difficult to gauge Dodson’s politics, as well as the political sentiments of his congregation, his lesson of April 28 certainly stood in stark contrast to those forwarded by Secessionist preachers who were, at the same time, taking the opportunity to espouse the Southern cause as God’s cause. Interestingly, local yeoman and Unionist, Basil A. Thomasson, was in attendance at Zion Methodist that Sunday. As a Methodist with a proven commitment to God and country, Thomasson no doubt supported Reverend Dodson’s pleas for peace and political caution. But Thomasson’s diary suggests more. Though he frequently attended and wrote about church services around his and neighboring counties, Thomasson never mentioned pro-secession or pro-war sermons in his diary. A lack of grassroots documentation makes it nearly impossible to confirm, but these combined factors suggest that religious messages preached and absorbed in rural, upcountry churches were, at least occasionally, unlike the fiery pro-Confederate speeches that resounded in mainline Southern Evangelical churches.


\textsuperscript{67} Solomon Hege [Davidson County, N.C.] to C. A. Hege, June 11, 1863, Constantine Alexander Hege Papers, SHC.

\textsuperscript{68} Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, April 28, 1861, in Escott, ed., \textit{North Carolina Yeoman}, 305.
Concurrent disputes within the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South further indicate that local sermons could be much different than the pro-Confederate exhortations that were then flowing from the top. In the process, the political rhetoric of the day took on renewed significance within the church as Southern clergy—Secessionists and anti-Secessionists alike—used it to appeal to their respective flocks’ sense of religious devotion, both civil and Scriptural. Isaac P. Martin, an early twentieth century Holston minister and church historian, illuminates this discourse with a “quaint story” he likely heard as a young man growing up in Strawberry Plains, Tennessee in the years following the Civil War. According to Reverend Martin, two Methodist ministers of opposing political sentiments agreed to hold a joint revival in East Tennessee “about the beginning of the war.” Latching onto the language of disunion, the “Southern preacher” urged the congregation to “secede from the world, the flesh and the devil.” However, the Unionist preacher, William H. H. Duggan, made a different plea, calling those in attendance to “form a union with the church and Christ.” In the end, neither secessionist preachers, nor Unionists ministers such as Duggan, claimed the day, as Holston Methodists, as well as other upcountry Christians, became fiercely divided as the Civil War pushed forward. Importantly, though, antagonism in the Holston Conference illuminates the Southern Orthodoxy’s inability to collectively convince upcountry Protestants in 1861 that God sanctioned secession, a lapse that helped shape regional political attitudes during the Civil War era and allowed a dissenting brand of anti-Confederate Protestantism to take root in the area.

As the war heated up during its second year, Holston Conference splintered further. At the General Conference meeting held in Athens, Tennessee on October 15, 1862, pro-Confederate church leaders headed by presiding Bishop John Early—a minister who was,

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according to Isaac P. Martin, “thoroughly imbued with the idea that Southern rights were identical with Christian ethics”—chided Unionist clergy for their conduct and singled out twelve Holston ministers for further investigation.\textsuperscript{70} Included was Reverend John Spears who was currently in federal military service, and thus promptly expelled, as well as William H. H. Duggan whom conference leaders placed on twelve month suspension.\textsuperscript{71} Meeting a year later in Wytheville, Virginia, Bishop Early and the pro-Confederate contingent placed more Holston ministers on watch, and voted to permanently expel several Unionist preachers from the conference, including Duggan.\textsuperscript{72} Despite debate among the general leadership, Early and his cohorts remained suspicious of “disloyalty” and continued to monitor potential political adversaries within their fold throughout the war.

Bishop Early and his ilk were specifically concerned with the politics of the church leadership, but their concerns allude to more widespread Unionist sentiment on the ground level. Following the ejection of Duggan and other church leaders in October 1862, Reverend William C. Bowman lamented to Reverend Richard N. Price that “by this day’s work we have lost in Holston at least ten thousand members,” a projection which proved to be a portent of forthcoming realities.\textsuperscript{73} Soon after federal forces gained control of East Tennessee in 1863, the “Loyal Methodists” of Holston Conference began abandoning the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and forming their own congregations. Meeting at a Protestant Episcopal Church in Knoxville on July 7, 1864, the anti-Confederate branch of Holston’s leadership resolved “no

\textsuperscript{71} Martin, *History of Methodism in Holston*, 73-74.
longer to live under the iron rule of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.”

Choosing to exit “the wilderness (not of Judea, but of Dixie),” they sought “reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, whose doctrine, usages, and faith are in accord with ours.”

Following the convention in Knoxville, the New York Times confirmed that at least one hundred and twelve Unionist preachers in East Tennessee—and probably “at least forty more”—had aligned with the new conference. Determined to “rebuild the waste places of Zion,” a combination of ordained and lay ministers resolved to encourage the Methodists within Holston’s jurisdiction to go “en masse to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States.” Their efforts in Union occupied East Tennessee were fruitful. According to the 1871 edition of the Methodist Quarterly Review, East Tennessee Methodists “came to us by the thousands.” In truth, accurate numbers are difficult to discern. Suffice to say that the transition was significant as whole churches in Union occupied East Tennessee professed their loyalty to the Union and to the “old Methodist church” in which they had been estranged from since 1845.

Upcountry Methodists who challenged the Southern Orthodoxy during the secession crisis and Civil War maintained a long-established regional tradition of religious dissent. Like other Protestants before them who had been discontented with the dominant Evangelical structure’s agenda, whether ecclesiastical, social, or political, they withdrew from a religious mainstream that stood opposed to their own conception of Christian ideals. For some, the division was concrete. The Union occupation of East Tennessee enabled loyal Holston Methodists to secede from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and reestablish ties with the

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74 Price, Holston Methodism, 353.
78 Ibid.
“old” church. However, for other anti-Confederates, perhaps most, severing former bonds of Christian unity was a psychological process. In 1860 and 1861, Unionist Methodists were the most vocal opponents of the Southern Orthodoxy. However, they were not alone; in time, other Southern Protestants fervently joined in their anti-Confederate chorus, although often in private. As the war moved beyond its first year, a variety of anti-Confederates—a loosely defined rank that grew by leaps and bounds after April 1862—became increasingly convinced that the Devil was in their midst and that Judgment was imminent. Certain that God would punish the South for its trespasses, anti-Confederates deemed it imperative to forsake any affiliation with Disunionists and to declare their spiritual loyalty to the Union. While anti-Confederates accepted that Satan may have temporarily led them astray, after April 1862 they increasingly renounced secession and knelt at the altar of the Union to have their sins washed away.
“Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

CHAPTER IV

“THE UNHOLY CAUSE”: RELIGIOUS DISSENT & THE CIVIL WAR

Opposition to the Confederacy steadily increased in the upcountry as the Civil War entered its second year. A minority of unconditional Unionists never wavered in their devotion to the holy national Union, even amidst the excitement of war fever that followed April 15, 1861. Yet, despite their prewar Unionism, many more voluntarily embraced the Confederate effort as their respective states mobilized for war in the spring and summer of 1861. After the war’s first year, however, Confederate policies such as conscription and impressment began to alienate Southerners, particularly in the upcountry where support for secession had initially been low. After April 1862, scores of families on the homefront and soldiers in the field began to question their allegiance to a government that they were coming to view as politically, morally, and religiously corrupt. In the process, more and more upcountry residents entered the anti-Confederate ranks, eventually reverting to outright Unionism. As the war slowly pushed forward, the discourse over the “folly” of secession transformed as dissenters began charging that disunion and fraternal warfare were reprehensible sins that, one way or another, would be atoned. Anti-Confederates still insisted that humans were culpable for the national tragedy; yet,

some began to claim that another agent was also at work. Following the spring of 1862 white
dissenters increasingly charged that the Confederate effort was an unholy affair orchestrated by
politicians and slaveowners in league with the Devil. Determined to protect their own interests,
these disciples of Satan were misleading the masses and herding innocent lambs to the slaughter.
In reaction, anti-Confederates insisted that God would punish Secessionists for tearing apart his
earthly kingdom and leading his holy citizens into temptation.

The Confederate Conscription Act, the first of which Richmond enacted in April 1862,
was the primary cause of disaffection. The law disillusioned men who were reluctant to enlist,
whether that was for political or religious reasons. But as Kenneth Noe argues, perhaps most
“reluctant rebels” had families and farms that required their attention. Their concerns were not
unfounded. The draft particularly handicapped wives and children who faced unmanageable
workloads, rising prices, impressment, and harassment at home. By the fall of 1862, food
shortages were extensive, a deficiency which coincided with the passage of the Second
Conscription Act which extended the draft age from eighteen to forty-five. In November 1862, a
resident of Stokes County in North Carolina’s Northwestern foothills noted the dire situation:

Unless you had visited our Western Counties you can form no conception of the
untold deprivation which would be entailed on our women and children. . . . Our
corn crop is short . . . and almost an entire failure in the wheat, rye, and oat crops.
. . . what men are left behind are in a constant state of uneasiness, not knowing at
what moment they may be called off into service, and hence they hold on to what
they have for their own families in case of emergency.

The following season, crops thrived on farms that had been able to plant, but the lack of able
hands at harvest time continued regional suffering. A resident of Surry County, just west of

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2 The Confederate government passed three Conscription Acts during the Civil War. The Act of April 16, 1862
called able bodied men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years of age. A few months later Richmond
extended the age range from eighteen to forty-five. The government extended the age range again in February of
1864 from seventeen to fifty years of age.

3 See Kenneth W. Noe, Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army After 1861 (Chapel Hill: The
University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Stokes, revealed that the “wheat crop looks fine for the season, but I fear that there are not men enough left to save it.”

Most of the disaffected were non-elites who did not own slaves. Identifying themselves as such, the vast majority of women and children in the upcountry relied on the fruit of their own labor to subsist after conscription passed. In January of 1863, a group of “Mothers Wives & Daughters” in the Blue Ridge foothills asked Governor Zebulon B. Vance to allow area men to remain on the homefront. The group reminded Vance that “we have very few slaves in Western North Carolina, therefore famine is staring us in the face. . . . [this] is and will be the case if more men are taken from this section.” The following month a group from nearby Yadkin County echoed their concerns. In a letter to Vance, the petitioners wrote, “we have not got a nuf men in the western part of this State . . . to make soport for the womin & children. . . . we have in a maner no Slaves in this cuntry our farms in general are cultivated with white men.” Confederate officials, however, were unmoved. Gradually the Confederacy’s unwillingness to relieve the suffering of “poor” families deepened disaffection. In return, many began questioning their dedication to “such a cause.”

A Wilkes County mother whose only son was killed in Confederate service was denied assistance “on the account that I never was married. . . . I am trying to make my own support but I must have some aid.” Noting that “our country is in a starving condition,” the distraught mother asked, “if the law dose not support sutch men’s mothers why dosit take them away from home to fight and die.”

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5 “Extract from a letter from Tom’s Creek, Surry County,” North Carolina Standard, May 6, 1863.
6 Petition to Governor Vance [Iredell, Wilkes, and Yadkin Counties], January 27, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, Governor Zebulon Baird Vance Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NCDAH.
7 “Confederate Friends” [Yadkin County] to Gov. Vance, February 17, 1863, Vance Papers, NCDAH.
9 M. Eler [Wilkes County] to Gov. Vance, June 1, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
10 Ibid.
Class resentment grew as members of the local aristocracy took advantage of wartime conditions for personal gain. A group of soldiers’ wives in Forsyth County, North Carolina alleged that some local men preferred to distill alcohol with their corn supply than to provide for area families in need. In a January 1863 letter, community women suggested ten guilty names and pleaded to Governor Vance for an investigation. Simply signed “Magnolia Lee & Co.,” the petitioners wrote:

We write to tell you, that, (notwithstanding the law to prohibit the distillation of grain) a number of our citizens; men, too, of wealth, and almost unlimited influence are stilling day & night (Sundays not excepted) and will consume much corn that should be kept for bread. . . . Every person in the neighborhood believes as we do, but are afraid of getting in a “difficulty,” should they express themselves publicly.11

In nearby Stokes County, Stokely Martin recognized that “large farmers, who have fine lands & laborers to work them are preparing to plant enormous crops of tobacco and only make corn enough for their own uses.” He suggested that the region’s farms could provide for “starving women & children” if ordered to plant corn rather than tobacco. Martin, “a Tobacco planter myself,” selflessly offered to “make any sacrifice” needed for the community.12

The Confederate Impressment Act passed in March 1863 only served to exacerbate anxieties. The law allowed Confederate troops to seize needed provisions from the civilian population, in exchange for a promissory note. However, a guarantee of future payment did little to comfort hungry upcountry residents who had little faith in Confederate money. In April 1864, Calvin Cowles, a noted Unionist from Wilkes County, North Carolina, informed Governor Vance that “Squads of men are traversing our county [taking] every thing they want and giving receipts for it. . . . they didn’t try to by of me but took without asking.” Cowles reported that

11 “Magnolia Lee & Co.” [Lewisville, Forsyth County] to Governor Vance, January 16, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
12 Stokely Martin [Stokes County] to Gov. Vance. March 24, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
“my case is the case of many.”13 Nearly a year later, “menny citizens” from the Francisco district of Stokes County complained to Governor Vance that “Details from Va comes over in this state and presses as tha call it & tha don’t care from who.”14

The presence of Confederate troops and horses stationed in the upcountry deepened resentment for secession and war. By 1863, even the inhabitants of locales such as western North Carolina, which was far from the battlefront, shared their space and provisions with soldiers and their animals. During the winter of 1863, for instance, the North Carolina hill country was overwhelmed by “a large lot of broken down Cavalry horses . . . quartered in the Counties of Wilkes, Yadkin, Ash and Surry.”15 The Richmond government sent the horses to the region to forage and recuperate until spring; however, their presence only compromised the already slim food supply.16 Coexisting with the animals further demoralized hungry families; some reported that the cavalry offered little money for their corn and impressed feed when needed. In mid-January, a group of thirty-four “citizens” appealed to Governor Vance for assistance.17 Richmond eventually removed the cavalry horses, but the episode continued to haunt the local population. Nearly a year later, Calvin Cowles feared that his community would again be “threatened with a Caravan of old broken winded Horses to eat us out of house & home.”18

13 Calvin J. Cowles [Wilkesboro] to Gov. Vance, April 21, 1864, Zebulon Baird Vance Private Collection, NCDAH.
15 Governor Vance to Secretary of War James A. Seddon [Richmond], January 22, 1863, in Joe A. Mobley, ed., The Papers of Zebulon B. Vance (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1995), 23.
18 Calvin J. Cowles [Wilkesboro] to Gov. Vance, December 12, 1863, Calvin J. Cowles Papers, NCDAH.
As death and hardships mounted, an anti-Confederate spirit materialized in the upcountry. The war fever which had spread in the late spring of 1861 eventually disappeared as unpopular Confederate policies disrupted the homefront, claiming lives and leaving many destitute. Political and religious dissent had been obvious in East Tennessee where unconditional Unionism had persisted, and where Holston Methodists were still bitterly divided. But the waves of disaffection that swept through the upcountry caused residents of western North Carolina and southwestern Virginia to eventually rekindle the Unionist fire which had burned within them in 1860 and early 1861. As the war pushed forward, anti-Confederates refused to accept civil war and the installation of a perceived “despotism” in Richmond as the Almighty’s plan for his chosen people.19

Unlike Southerners who championed secession and the Civil War as part of a Divine cause, wartime dissenters deemed the Confederate effort as inherently sinful. As early as the fall of 1861, Methodist “Parson” Brownlow proclaimed in the Knoxville Whig that the Civil War was the “most wicked, cruel, unnatural, and uncalled for war ever recorded in history.” Doubting Providence’s approval, Brownlow insisted that he did not “recognize the hand of God in . . . [its] inauguration.”20 Asbury Speer, a North Carolina yeoman and Methodist, echoed his remarks. On August 15, 1863, Speer, then thirty-seven and reluctantly in Confederate service, informed

19 By mid 1863 anti-Confederates often referred to the Richmond government as despotism. For example, in June 1863 Barton Smith wrote to his brother back home in Carroll County, Virginia that “our government is fast degenerating into a military despotism. A few tyrants rule the nation now. When we were on the last marches, there were a great many men who were, and had been sick, and consequently could not keep up and fell behind though they would get into camp a few hours after the army. And all these men were severely punished for this thing. Just because they couldn’t keep up, but was there in time for all the duties they had to perform.” Barton Pierce Smith [“Camp near Hanover Junction”] to “My Dear Brothers”[Carroll County, VA], June 17, 1863. Smith Family Letters, Newman Library, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, hereafter cited as NL. Similarly, following the end of the war, a group of anti-Confederates in Surry County, North Carolina and Carroll and Patrick Counties in Virginia rejoiced that “the iron heel of tyranny and despotism has been removed from off the necks of the southern people.” Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, William L. Scott Papers, RL.

20 “Closing the Knoxville Whig,” Knoxville Whig, October 24, 1861, in William Gannaway Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession: with a Narrative of Personal Adventures Among the Rebels (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1862), 178.
his Unionist father back home in the Yadkin Valley that “I do not believe that God had any more
hand in bringing on the war than the child unborn did.” Instead, like countless other anti-
Confederates, Speer opined that “the secessionists are the men to blame” for the “unholy” war.

So too did Virginia Episcopalian and unconditional Unionist, John M. Botts, who alleged that
“political gamblers,” that “handful of bad and selfish men” who pushed for secession, were liable
for the “wicked work.” Expressing nearly identical sentiments were Isham Cox, a Quaker
leader in the North Carolina Piedmont, and Henry H. Prout, an Episcopal missionary who had
served the upcountry since at least 1842. Finding common religious and political ground, the
men shared religious tracts and were in correspondence by late 1864. Corresponding in 1864
both men agreed that the “bad passions of men” had initiated the “worldly” war. Significantly,
Prout revealed to Cox that he had “lately preached” against the war to his congregation at St.
John’s Episcopal Church in Williamsboro, North Carolina, an admission that further challenges
the notion that Southern clergy either supported the Confederacy or remained silent.

Still, the rhetoric of human folly evolved over time, expanding and taking on an
increasingly ominous tone as the Civil War raged on. Though anti-Confederates never doubted

21 Asbury Speer to Aquilla Speer, Aug. 15, 1863, in Allen Paul Speer, ed., Voices from Cemetery Hill: The Civil
War Diary, Reports, and Letters of Colonel William Henry Asbury Speer (1861-1864) (Johnson City, TN: The
Overmountain Press, 1997), 113.
22 Isaac Copeland [in camp] to Hardin Copeland [Dobson], March 24, 1864, Copeland Family Letters, Private
Collection of Joe Hicks, Elkin, N.C.; Asbury Speer to Aquilla Speer, Aug. 15, 1863, in Speer, ed., Voices from
Cemetery Hill, 113; John Minor Botts, The Great Rebellion: Its Secret History, Rise, Progress, and
23 Starting in 1842, Prout served as an Episcopal missionary in the North Carolina mountains, primarily in Ashe
and Watuga Counties. By 1864 he was serving as a church rector in Williamsboro in North Carolina’s north-central
Piedmont. Lewis Wright, “Anglo-Catholicism in antebellum North Carolina: Levi Silliman Ives and the Society of
the Holy Cross,” Anglican and Episcopal History, 69 (2002), 6; Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of
America General, Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church
in the United States of America, Assembled in A General Convention, Held in St. Andrew's Church in the City of
Philadelphia, From October 4 to October 24 Inclusive, In the Year of Our Lord 1865. With an Appendix Containing
the Constitution, A List of the Clergy, Etc. (Boston: William A. Hall, 1865), 422.
24 H. H. Prout [Williamsboro] to Isham Cox, December 28, 1864, in “A brief account of the life and travels of Isham
Cox, Written by himself,” Isham Cox Papers, FHC.
Secessionists’ culpability in severing the Union and the bloodshed that followed, it eventually appeared to some that a nonhuman influence was lurking in the country. Yet, unlike their Confederate neighbors who found Divine meaning in the Civil War, upcountry dissenters insisted that if an otherworldly instigator was at work, it was undoubtedly Satan, “the author of all evil,” rather than God, “the author of all good.”26 As their religious interpretation of events broadened, dissenters reaffirmed in an even more desperate pitch their rejection of the Southern Orthodoxy’s claim that Providence willed the Confederacy and its consecration in blood. In an 1862 address, outspoken Tennessee Methodist William Brownlow attacked mainstream Southern Evangelicals who “ascribed to the finger of God . . . what has been done by the agency of the devil.” Referencing Mark 5:13, he asserted that the only “agency that God had in the matter [of disunion and war] was to permit these devils to enter into the Secessionists, just as He permitted them to enter the herd of swine and precipitate them into the Sea of Galilee!”27 The “Fighting Parson” of East Tennessee was far from alone in his sentiments. As death and disaffection mounted, upcountry residents increasingly sensed that Secessionists were in cooperation with Satan, an awakening that encouraged many to renounce their affiliation with the Confederacy moving forward.

As Lucifer became a central actor in the Civil War, dissenters began to perceive of Secessionists and pro-Confederates as his earthly agents whose aims were purely selfish. In an effort to explain why thousands of Southerners had fallen from grace, anti-Confederates charged that Secessionists had deceitfully used lies and heresies to lure the masses into embracing disunion and war. On one end the Southern Orthodox clergy distorted Scripture in an effort to lead Southerners down an unrighteous path. At the same time, ambitious Secessionist politicians

26 Quoted from Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession, 179.
27 Ibid., 178-179.
crafted false promises to draw skeptics into their political corner. Virginian John M. Botts watched Disunionists “gradually” develop the ploy over a series of three decades. By mid-April 1861 their “detestable doctrines” had “succeeded in seducing” most white Southerners into the Confederate fold, including a number of previously ardent Upper South Unionists. 28 Episcopal vestryman Edward Carter Turner agreed, grieving in 1863 that Virginians had allowed Secessionists to lead them “blindly” into a “most unholy, unnecessary war.” Perhaps Virginia had at one time elicited the Creator’s blessing, but Turner suggested that Secessionists and their evil designs left the Old Dominion’s “alters profaned.” 29 East Tennessee Unionist, Daniel Ellis, drew a similar conclusion, noting just after the war ended that “a set of vile and seditious politicians” led “thousands of their misguided followers” to become “victims in the unholy cause.” 30

If the Confederate effort rested on the influence of the “Prince of Evil” then the Confederate ranks were, in effect, his legion of warriors. 31 Of course, conscription forced many Southern men to serve in the military against their will, a realization in which dissenters—most of which were directly or indirectly touched by conscription—were generally sympathetic. But others who embraced the call to serve could appear to have been besieged by the Devil. Writing in December 1864, J.W. Rawley of Mount Airy, North Carolina regretted to his friend Calvin Cowles in nearby Wilkesboro that he and other members of the Surry County Home Guard just returned “home from a campaign in Aleighany where we or at least some of Gov. Vances forces destroyed innocent men’s property and left poor women & children in a destitute condition. . . .

28 Botts, The Great Rebellion, 224.
30 Ellis, The Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis, 14.
Yes I think the devil himself (would (?) ) blush at some of the deeds that are done in a country that was once free from such outrage. . . . they spare none."32 At the close of the war, Daniel Ellis of East Tennessee recalled an incident in 1864 in which the “incarnate devils” brutally murdered a local anti-Confederate in front of his cabin while his wife looked on. Before leaving the scene, the “inhuman monsters” helped themselves to blankets and clothing further leaving the the widow and her four children in despair. Ellis feared that “such demons should exist” in the “land of Bibles and civilization.”33

In relation, dissenters evoked the American civil religion to insist that willful support for the Confederacy was unpatriotic and therefore innately unchristian. Placing God and country on nearly equal pedestals, North Carolina Piedmont native, Bryan Tyson, proclaimed in 1863 that “Justice to liberty, our country and our God demand that we keep united.” Alluding to anti-Confederate Southerners as religious sufferers who remained devoted to God’s Union despite “persecutions,” Tyson in effect equates their “hope, in the end, of seeing the stars and stripes wave triumphantly over them” as their unwavering Christian dedication and their fervent anticipation of the return the Almighty’s holy kingdom on earth.34 Robert P. Dick of nearby Guilford County expressed related sentiments. After North Carolinians elected pro-Confederate Zebulon B. Vance over peace candidate William W. Holden in the 1864 gubernatorial election, Robert P. Dick was “astounded” that his state “declared for Jeff Davis, for war and for utter ruin and desolation!”35 Guilford and the surrounding North Carolina upcountry may have been a bastion of Holden support, but Dick decried the general loss of “the reason, the patriotism, and

32 J.W. Rawley [Mount Airy] to Calvin Cowles [Wilkesboro], December 8, 1864, Calvin Cowles Papers, NCDAH.
the Christianity of our [Southern] people,” a fateful declension that many dissenters believed would cause God to judge pro-Confederates harshly.\footnote{Ibid.}

**Reckoning**

After April 1862 it became increasingly clear to dissenters that pro-Confederates were willing to forsake an eternity in Glory for fleeting power on earth. Still, the disaffected had no doubt that a just God would ultimately require Secessionists to atone for their wrongdoings. It may have been the unfortunate masses that were paying for the leadership’s sins with their own blood and suffering in the interim, but anti-Confederates expressed faith that God would smite their oppressors by and by. Some wished to see the process begin immediately in the human world. Writing to a friend in June 1863, disillusioned conscript Isaac Thompson hoped that “the hand of the destroyer would over take [sic]” the Confederate leadership and “remove them from our midst.”\footnote{Isaac Thompson [Richmond, VA] to A. J. L. Cameron, June 20, 1863, in Hester Bartlett Jackson, ed., *Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War* (Charlotte: Delmar Printing, 1992), 242.} Similarly, two months later, reluctant Confederate and Methodist, Asbury Speer, wanted Secessionists back home in the Yadkin Valley to “ketch it” from their disaffected neighbors.\footnote{Asbury Speer to Aquilla Speer, Aug. 15, 1863, in Speer, ed., *Voices from Cemetery Hill*, 113.} But if not justified in life, Thompson, Speer and other anti-Confederate Protestants in the upcountry insisted that a fierce Day of Reckoning was nigh. If the Divine did not intervene to allow for the chastisement of pro-Confederates on earth, then he would most certainly call them to vindication in the spiritual realm.

Unionists and the disaffected alike had no doubt that God would require his people to pay penance for their crimes of disunion and their complicity in an “unhallowed war.”\footnote{Quoted from A. M. Johnson [“Camp 21st NC Reg.” from Surry County] to Gov. Vance, January 30, 1865, Vance Private Collection, NCDAH.} Some feared God would rebuke the entire nation if war continued unchecked due to the inability of leaders
North and South to negotiate reunion. Following the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, peace advocates in North Carolina resolved “that God will avenge himself on this American people, if this unnatural, fratricidal butchery is suffered to go on.”\textsuperscript{40} But more often anti-Confederates singled out the South as the target of God’s impending wrath. Those “wicked rulers” that labored for disunion may have been the guilty party, but dissenters understood that, as Southerners, God may punish them as well. In June 1863 Isaac Thompson assumed that most of the upcountry men in his North Carolina regiment desired peace and reunion, regardless of the terms. Though he prayed for God’s mercy, he feared that famine would soon “visit our land with great destruction.”\textsuperscript{41} Likewise, in 1864, John M. Botts resigned to accept that he and other Unionists would pay for the crime of secession. Referring to disunion as the South’s “original sin,” he suggested that one had to look no further than Scripture to see that God would require atonement from “the good and the bad alike.” Just as “Divine law . . . made [all humans] responsible for the original sin of that venerable old lady known as Madame Eve,” Botts discerned that he and other anti-Confederates would pay for “the original sin of those with whom it has been my fortune to be mixed up geographically.” Unfair perhaps, but Botts reasoned that he was as culpable in secession as he was in Eve’s crime of “eating an apple six thousand years ago that I never saw.”\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{42} John M. Botts to “friend,” January 22, 1864, in Botts, \textit{The Great Rebellion}, 314.
Geographical association might require Southerners, Unionists and Confederates alike, to suffer together temporarily. Yet, as promised in Matthew 3:12, anti-Confederates rested assure that God would eventually separate the wheat from the chaff. Unconditional Unionists such as Tennessee Methodist William G. Brownlow and Virginia Presbyterian John M. Botts who made their commitment to the American civil religion the cornerstone of their dissent never doubted that God would later reward their Christian devotion to the Union. At the same time, however, they knew that Disunionists would not be able to “evade their accountability to God” for the crime of secession which was, according to Botts, was “the most atrocious and stupendous crime that has been committed since the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” In a similar vein, Alexander Jones, an Unconditional Unionist who lived near Asheville, warned that the Bible condemns secession outright. Following Lucifer’s attempt to secede from Heaven, he insisted that the Almighty banished him to Hell for evermore, “no doubt where the most of the instigators of this suicidal war will land in the end.”

Unlike Botts, Brownlow, and Jones, perhaps most upcountry whites deferred to the Devil and his Confederacy in the late spring of 1861. Still, many renounced their sin and returned to the side of righteousness as mounting class tensions encouraged common Southerners to reject the Southern effort, occasionally en masse in places such as portions of North Carolina’s Piedmont and foothills. Unionist Bryan Tyson suggested a Scriptural correlation between an “irreligious” Southern leadership and growing resentment among the common masses on the North Carolina homefront. Alluding to Proverbs 20:2, Tyson pointed out in 1862, that “when the

43 Botts, The Great Rebellion, 226; Brownlow, Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession, 149.
44 Alexander Hamilton Jones, Knocking at the Door: Knocking at the Door. Alex. H. Jones, Member-Elect to Congress: His Course Before the War, During the War, and After the War. Adventures and Escapes (Washington, D.C.: McGill & Witherow, 1866), 14.
wicked rule the people mourn.”45 As disaffection settled in, class conscious anti-Confederates joined together in a chorus of dissent that mimicked the utterances of outspoken Unionists such as Botts and Brownlow. Reclaiming the Unionism they had espoused prior to the war, dissenters increasingly avowed that on the Day of Judgment God would damn Secessionists who misleadingly and abruptly ushered Southern Christians into a vortex of sin. Isaac Thompson, a yeoman from the North Carolina foothills, believed that Southern leaders had gotten “so bold in wickedness” by June 1863 that he assumed that “god will crush them for their deeds” in the world to come.46 King Hiram Bray, a disaffected Yadkin Valley farmer and Primitive Baptist, echoed Thompson the following summer. In August 1864 Bray opined to his mother, Mary, that God would “make all that was too keen for this war give an account for their cruel actions here below.”47 In the end, Bray envisioned an eternity of “everlasting fire” for Secessionists who initiated the war so “that they might grow rich.”48

Denouncing the dominant order was nothing new to upcountry folk Protestants, such as Primitive Baptist King Hiram Bray, whose religious choices underscored their rejection of the socioreligious mainstream. However, as the Civil War exacerbated class tensions it placed renewed emphasis on their dissent. Confederate policies such as conscription and impressment convinced many non-elites that the slaveocracy had duped the masses into a self-serving cause. Speaking on behalf of his neighbors, in July 1863, Robert W. Hill warned North Carolina

45 Bryan Tyson, A Ray of Light, or, a Treatise on the Sectional Troubles, Religiously and Morally Considered (Brower’s Mill, N.C.: Published by the Author, 1862), 89.
46 Isaac Thompson [Richmond, VA] to A. J. L. Cameron, June 20, 1863, in Jackson, ed., Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War, 242.
47 Bray was more than likely a Primitive Baptist. His wife, Jerusha [Alberty] Bray, who died in 1875 was the daughter of a local Primitive Baptist elder, Nathan C. Alberty, and is likely buried at Cody Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Surry County, North Carolina. The burial records appear incomplete, but it is likely that King was buried there as well. Jackson, ed., Heritage of Surry County, North Carolina, Vol. I, 8, 67. King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Richmond”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County], August 21, 1864, in Jackson, ed., Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War, 279.
48 King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Richmond”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County], August 21, 1864, in Jackson, ed., Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War, 279.
Governor Zebulon B. Vance that the “common people” in the state’s northwestern foothills had “become very jealous of our rulers,” believing that they “made laws for the rich and bound the poor in chains.” As a Primitive Baptist minister, Hill pointed out that he “traveled among” the common class, and insisted that he knew the “sentiment” in the Stokes County vicinity. Drawing on a denominational tradition of socioreligious independence, Hill made clear to Vance that his religious “order” was not aligned with the Southern Orthodoxy, and that “the people” in his region were no longer willing to submit to an “unmerciful tyrant.” Highlighting the class consciousness that laid just below the surface of folk Protestantism, Hill assumed that Vance was unfamiliar with Old Time Baptist religion, a tradition he claimed “lawyers and statesmen know very little about and perhaps care less.” Though he was aware of “a few” Primitive Baptists that held positions of political influence in the state, Hill surmised that those individuals “may think more of their earthly calling than they do of their hevenly [sic].”

In addition to illuminating how Primitive Baptists defined themselves as peripheral to the dominant order, Robert W. Hill’s letter also indicates that folk Protestants could use their self-perceived socioreligious distinctiveness to underscore their noncompliance with the Confederate cause. Hill’s inclusion that he was an Old Time Baptist minister with a wide-ranging network of associates was no vain addendum to the substance of his letter. Rather, it was a calculated attempt to express that the Southern Orthodoxy had failed to claim the “common people” in his portion of the upcountry, and that it would furthermore have a difficult time convincing them

49 R. W. Hill [Germanton] to Governor Vance, between July 28-31, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH. Hill claimed to be “a minister of the Gospel of the Old Regular Baptist Church;” however, minutes of the Mayo and Fisher River Primitive Baptist Associations indicate that Robert W. Hill was an elder in the Clear Springs Primitive Baptist Church which was a member of the Mayo Association. The Fisher River and Mayo Associations were “sister associations” in regular correspondence. Robert W. Hill regularly attended regional meetings as a representative of Mayo Association. See Jesse A. Ashburn, History of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association, 1832-1904 (Laurel Fork, VA: F.P. Branscome, 1905); and Minutes of the Mayo Baptist Association Held at Russell Creek Church, Patrick County, VA., Commencing May 17th, 1862. And At Matrimony Church, Rockingham County, N.C., Commencing October 19th, 1862 (Winston, N.C.: Printed at the “Sentinel” Office, 1863).
that its pro-Confederate doctrines were religiously, socially, or politically sound. Though Hill was clear about his own denominational affiliation, he never mentioned if the “acquaintance[s]” in question were Primitive Baptists. More than likely, some were while others were not. Yet, in a larger context it hardly matters. Hill wrote generally about the “common people” in the region, or “the poor” as he also referred to them, who he felt certain had withdrawn their support for the Confederacy and its “oppressive” war effort. Whether Baptists, Methodists or otherwise, wartime sociopolitical dissent highlighted a cross-denominational folk Protestant spirit in the upcountry that stood opposed to the Southern Evangelical mainstream. As “poor” Protestants sharing a regional identity and experience, and connected through bonds of faith, kinship, and community, they yoked themselves together during the war years perhaps more closely than ever before.  

Still, it is worthwhile to speculate that Robert W. Hill’s work as a Primitive Baptist elder informed his insight into the breadth of disaffection in his portion of the upcountry. As a church leader, Hill would have been intimately associated with the flock he shepherded at Clearsprings Primitive Baptist Church near Danbury, North Carolina. But his church service allowed him to build a network that stretched beyond his immediate locale. Clearsprings was one of fourteen churches that comprised the Mayo Primitive Baptist Association. As a church elder, Hill traveled to Association meetings throughout Mayo’s jurisdiction which included Stokes and

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50 R. W. Hill [Germanton] to Governor Vance, between July 28-31, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH. The 1850 and 1860 censuses simply list R. W. Hill’s occupation as a “B. Minister” and an “O. R. Baptist Minister,” respectively. He does not appear to have owned any real estate at the time of the censuses; yet he was a community leader. In addition to being a minister, he was an Assistant Marshall for Stokes County for the 1860 census (i.e., he gathered the census data for his neighborhood). Seventh Census of the U.S, 1850:, Stokes County, N.C., Population Schedule; Eighth Census of the U.S, 1860:, Stokes County, N.C., Population Schedule.

51 The 1862 the Mayo Primitive Baptist Association included at least three churches in Stokes County, North Carolina (Clearsprings Church, Snow Creek Church, and State Line Church), at least two churches in Rockingham County, North Carolina (Sardis Church and Matrimony Church), and at least four churches in Patrick County, Virginia (Spoon Creek Church, Buffalo Church, Russell Creek Church, and Bell Spur Church). Five additional churches were also members of Mayo Association, but their locations are unclear (Sugar Tree Church, Grayham’s Church, Cross Roads Church, Cascade Church, and Ridings Church). Minutes of the Mayo Baptist Association, May 17th, 1862, 4.
Rockingham counties in North Carolina and Patrick County in Virginia. Furthermore, as a correspondent to various “sister associations” that covered much of northwestern North Carolina and southwestern Virginia, Hill occasionally journeyed beyond the bounds of his own conference. In 1862, the Mayo Association appointed Hill to serve as liaison to six Primitive Baptist Associations in the upcountry including the Fisher River Association, which comprised Surry County, North Carolina and Carroll County, Virginia.\(^{52}\) Interestingly, minutes of the Fisher River Association reveal that during the Civil War some church members, men in particular, joined the Heroes of America.\(^{53}\) Also, known as the Red Strings, the Heroes of America was a secret organization of Southern Unionists determined to chip away at the Confederate cause by aiding deserters as well as Federal troops passing through their vicinity. It is quite possible that anti-Confederate members of the Fisher River Association were among the “acquaintance[s]” in “surrounding counties” that Hill had in mind as he penned his letter to Governor Vance in the summer of 1863.\(^{54}\)

\[\text{Figure 10: The Mayo Primitive Baptist Association and its “Sister Associations.”}\]


\(^{53}\) Ashburn, History of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association, 57-58.

\(^{54}\) Quoted from, R. W. Hill [Germanton] to Governor Vance, between July 28-31, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
Figure 11: Elder Calvin Blackburn & Martha (Harper) Blackburn, c. 1875. Calvin Blackburn served as an elder in the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association. It is likely that the Blackburns were intimately acquainted with Robert W. Hill. For the later portion of the 1860s, at least, Elder Blackburn led the congregation at Volunteer Church in Stokes County, not far from Clearsprings Church where Hill ministered. Photograph courtesy of Ruby Lambert, Mount Airy, N.C.

Of course, Robert W. Hill’s evaluation of regional “sentiment” was certainly more substantial than a simple awareness of a few Primitive Baptists a county or so away who had renounced the Confederate cause. Stokes, Surry, and surrounding upcountry counties were centers of disaffection and political dissent by mid-1863, a reality that Hill experienced and understood well.55 In addition to being a church elder, Hill, who was nearly fifty years old in 1863, was also a trusted community leader who neighbors felt secure speaking with “confidentially” about politics and the war. As his letter to Governor Vance indicates, it was Hill

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who neighbors selected to relay their grievances to the state administration on their behalf. It is probable that Hill was familiar with men in his very neighborhood such as Reuben Tilley and William McCaulless who were also “opposed to the rebellion,” and like their counterparts in the neighboring county joined “the Red strings party,” which they recognized as “the Union party.”

As a church elder and community advocate, Hill certainly would have known many of the “outraged” women of Stokes County and the outlying areas who were struggling to feed themselves and their families while their male relatives were reluctantly in Confederate service.”

It is also possible that Hill knew at least some of the “menny citizens” of Stokes County who complained to Governor Vance in February 1865 that Confederate troops were taking much needed provisions from civilians on the homefront, “& tha don’t care from who [sic].” The soldiers’ actions were legal under the Confederate Impressment Act of 1863, a fact that further convinced Hill and others across the foothill region that the Confederacy was their primary enemy.

Wartime legislation such as the Impressment and Conscription Acts required Southerners to support the Confederate war effort in body and resources. Yet the disaffection that accompanied these measures often caused common Southerners—the “poor” whose “labor has been the bulwark of the nation but no thanks”—to psychologically revoke their support from what they viewed as a repressive regime. Try as it might, the Southern establishment, an enterprise in which mainline churches were part and parcel, was unable to sustain a sense of

56 Claim of William McCaulless, Claim 11,063, deposition taken in Stokes County, 1874, (Record Group 217), Southern Claims Commission Records for Stokes County, N.C., Records of the Accounting Officers of the Department of the Treasury, National Archives II, College Park, MD; Claim of Reuben Tilley, Claim 5,945, Stokes County, N.C., 1878, RG 217, hereafter referred to as SCC.
57 Stokely Martin [Stokes County] to Governor Vance, March 24, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
58 “John Beasley & menny citizens” [Stokes County] to Gov. Vance, February 26, 1865, Vance Private Collection, NCDAH.
59 Quoted from, R. W. Hill [Germanton] to Governor Vance, between July 28-31, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
Confederate nationalism in the South as a whole.\textsuperscript{60} This was particularly true in the upcountry where a tradition of dissent merged with wartime disaffection. Thus, rather than envisioning themselves as complicit in an unholy cause, the dissenting “poor” imagined themselves as unfortunate pawns directed by corrupt leaders into a wicked game. Upcountry men conscripted into Confederate service found it particularly urgent to absolve themselves of sins they determined belonged to the Southern leadership rather than the rank and file. In 1863 Quaker conscript Tilghman Vestal confided to his diary that disaffected infantrymen in the Fourteenth Tennessee regiment had the “incredible idea” that God would ultimately pardon their involvement in the destruction of the Union, choosing to believe instead that “the Authorities who compelled them to fight would be accountable . . . at the day of Judgment.”\textsuperscript{61} King Hiram Bray expressed a similar clarity of conscience while serving as a conscript in the Second North Carolina Battalion. Believing that an omnipresent God understood his individual plight and would redeem the guiltless in the end, Bray rejoiced that “there is a reward laid up for the faithful” in Heaven.\textsuperscript{62} On April 25, 1864, he insisted to his mother that the sins of the Southern leadership “lie at their own door and not mine because I feel clear of ever having anything to do toward bringing on this war,” a declaration that he felt confident making “in the presence of Our God.”\textsuperscript{63} But Bray entertained little hope for the fate of Secessionists. “Thank God,” Bray wrote.


\textsuperscript{61} Diary of Tilghman Vestal Diary, 1863, John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC.

\textsuperscript{62} King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Orange Court House, Va”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County, N.C.], April 25, 1864, Jackson, ed., \textit{Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War}, 275-276.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
to his mother again the following month, that the Almighty “is too just to let them escape without rendering their excuse.”

Though dissenters primarily charged that it was the heretical Southern leadership that could expect an eternity of hellfire, they occasionally predicted that God would spare little of his wrath on ground level individuals who embraced the Confederate cause with so much zeal that they acted violently against their fellow Southerners. They were people who, in effect, utterly renounced their faith via their overt and vicious contempt for the holy national Union and its citizenry of devoted Christians. Anti-Confederates expected that Southern soldiers who enjoyed doing Satan’s bidding in the field of battle would be tried as murderers in God’s final court. Yet, they envisioned a potentially more severe punishment for those who committed wicked acts against fellow civilians, at times neighbors, on the homefront. East Tennessean Daniel Ellis assumed that those “rebel fiends” who attacked “innocent Union men” near his home in Carter County would be forever damned. Referring to a related incident, Ellis supposed that a Confederate who was responsible for atrocities on the homefront “may rest assured that he will meet with his just reward when death shall have terminated his earthly existence, and transferred his guilty soul into the awful presence of the great Eternal.” However, Ellis insinuated that God was perhaps most displeased that Confederate murderers left Unionist households devoid of husbands, fathers, son, and brothers. After a group of Confederates shot a local husband and father in 1864, Ellis charged that God would “follow these murderers” throughout their time on earth before “at last fully reward[ing] them for their iniquities in the dark regions of eternal

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64 King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Richmond”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County, N.C.], May 29, 1864, Jackson, ed., *Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War*, 277.
66 Ibid., 411-412.
despair.” Ellis expected a particularly severe punishment for Confederate officer James A. Keith and the “rebel demons” under his charge who shot execution-style thirteen anti-Confederates, including boys as young as thirteen and fourteen years of age, near Shelton Laurel in the mountains of North Carolina in January 1863. In the wake of the war, Ellis insisted that Keith’s unholy crime against his fellow Madison Countians was enough to “cause the whole angelic host to plead with all their eloquence for his vile name to be erased from the everlasting records of heaven.” Keith’s orchestration of a mass murder, Ellis assumed, would surely cause his “soul to be cast into the dismal lake which burns with fire and brimstone, where there shall forever be ‘weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.’”

As Christians laboring for God and the maintenance of his earthly nation, anti-Confederate Protestants imagined that the Almighty would reward them by appointing them to his holy tribunal on the Day of Judgment. Dissenters occasionally imagined that fanatical Confederate soldiers would report to their earthly foes in the afterlife before they made their final dissent into hell. After a band of Confederate guerillas shot a contingent of North Carolina Unionists—including a Methodist preacher—attempting to reach Federal lines in East Tennessee in 1864, Daniel Ellis insisted that victims would rise to condemn their “infamous murderers.” Following a similar incident, Ellis assumed that the slain Southern Unionists would be the ones to direct their killers “to the bar of retributive justice” where God would sentence them to the “dismal region ‘where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched.’” At the same time, upcountry dissenters occasionally insisted that Southern politicians would encounter a frightening spectacle of gaunt-faced, bullet-ridden Confederate corpses rising up to bear witness

67 Ibid., 215-216.
68 Ibid., 215-216. For a scholarly account of the massacre at Shelton Laurel, see Philip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press).
70 Ibid., 350-351.
at Judgment. In August 1864, King Hiram Bray opined to his mother back home in Surry County that God would summon those reluctant Confederates who were “murdered” in battle to testify against the Southern leaderships’ “cruel deeds” on earth. At that fateful meeting, Bray supposed that Secessionists would recoil, wishing that they were “one of them that was slain in that world[,] than to be cast in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Tennessean Daniel Ellis imagined that the Confederate dead would rally around Jefferson Davis in particular, and condemn him for being the one who “occasioned the winged messengers of death to snatch away our lives.”

Though some upcountry residents envisioned a brutal Reckoning Day for Southern politicians and the most fervent of their henchmen, others remained optimistic that God would allow their fellow sinners to transition more peacefully into death. East Tennessee Unionist William Laban Brown attended Mount Olive Church, an evangelical, pro-mission folk Baptist church on the outskirts of Knoxville. Though he volunteered to serve in a Federal cavalry unit, Brown did not wish his political and military foes in the present world, individuals who were

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71 King Hiram Bray [“Camp near Richmond”] to Mary Whitaker Bray [Surry County], August 21, 1864, in Jackson, ed., *Surry County Soldiers in the Civil War*, 279. Bray was more than likely a Primitive Baptist. His wife, Jerusha [Alberty] Bray, is buried at Cody Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Surry County, North Carolina. The records are incomplete, but it is likely that King was buried there as well. Jackson, ed., *Heritage of Surry County, North Carolina*, Vol. I, 67.


often fellow Tennesseans, to experience eternal damnation in the world to come. In the truest of
evangelical fashion, Brown hoped that God would soon fill the hearts of the misled and encourage them to seek peace in this life so that they may enjoy everlasting peace in the next. Instead of finding Confederate leaders irreparably condemned to everlasting fire—a viewpoint perhaps more suited to Primitive Baptists and others influenced by Calvinism—in June 1864 Brown still had hope that “the love of Christ might be extended to all in authority” and otherwise, “so that when we come to die we won’t be afraid to die.”

Other upcountry Protestants, perhaps pacifist Quakers and Moravians in particular, hoped for a more joyful Judgment Day as well. Tennessee Quaker Tilghman Vestal found that the war then raging made clear that Americans, Northerners and Southerners of all political stripes, were failing to take seriously Christ’s messages of love of peace. But rather than condemning the guilty for eternity, a “just God,” he confided to his diary in 1864, would pardon in the hereafter earthly mistakes made by those who are “ignorant of his law.” Ultimately, Vestal imagined, Americans would set their guns and politics aside and “shake hands in heaven where they will love each other for ever.” At the same time, despite their hardships, North Carolina Moravians Solomon and Catherine Hege chose to navigate their earthly course with a “cheerful heart,” and hoped by June 1863 that “the Gospel of Jesus Christ” would “sway the hearts” of Americans north and south, as well.” Similar to William Brown, the evangelical folk Baptist from East Tennessee, the Heges expressed hope that God would “interpose” and encourage sinners to repent. True to their religious principles, both their Moravian pacifism and their Christian love

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74 William L. Brown [Camp at Athens, Allabamey, Limestone County] to “Dear Wife and Children” [Knox County, TN], June 16, 1864. William L. Brown letters, AOA.
75 Ibid.
76 Diary of Tilghman Vestal, 1864, John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC.
77 Solomon and Catherine Hege [Davidson County, N.C.] to Constantine Alexander Hege [in camp], March 8, 1863; and Solomon Hege [Davidson County, N.C.] to “My dear son, C.A. Hege” [in camp], June 11, 1863, in Constantine Alexander Hege Papers, SHC. Also see Solomon Hege [Davidson County, N.C.] to “My dear son, C.A. Hege” [in camp], September 14, 1863, in Ibid.
of country, the Heges, including their son Alexander who was reluctantly in Confederate service with the Forty-Eight North Carolina Infantry, advocated peace and favored a national reunion by the fall of 1863. Unlike other dissenters who suggested that sectional politics dictated one’s fate, Solomon Hege insisted, and likely his family members and other Moravians agreed, that God would ultimately define the wicked as those who had evil within their hearts. “The Day of Judgment will prove,” he wrote to his son Alexander in September 1864, “who is for peace and who is for war.”78

In the 1860s, the vast majority of Southern Moravians, including the Hege family, continued to live in the vicinity of Wachovia.79 Therefore, geographically speaking, Southern Moravians had remained relatively static. Yet, as a people they had evolved from a somewhat insular, German-speaking sect living commune-style on the edge of the backcountry, to a complex society with the modern city of Salem serving as one of the busiest economic centers and waypoints in western North Carolina.80 Hardly isolated, they engaged with the larger community in work and social spaces, often laboring among and intermarrying with other Protestants. Evangelical in nature, Moravians embraced interdenominationalism with a primary hope of directing individuals toward salvation. They welcomed non-Moravians into their churches and occasionally coordinated religious meetings with other local congregations, perhaps Methodists in particular. Through these exchanges and others, as S. Scott Rohrer argues in Hope’s Promise, North Carolina Moravians had acculturated and become “Southern” by 1860.81

79 Wachovia covered much of modern-day Forsyth County, NC. The Hege family lived in Friedberg, Davidson County, a Moravian settlement established in 1769 approximately nine miles south of Salem in Davidson County.
80 Basil A. Thomasson who frequently traveled to Salem described it as “a thriving town, and a nice place.” Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, December 21, 1864, in Escott, ed., North Carolina Yeoman, 57.
In general, Moravians were politically in step with the larger foothill community during the Civil War era. Though many progressively reverted to Unionism by mid-1863, evidence suggests that war fever infected Southern Moravian settlements just as it did other upcountry communities following Lincoln’s call for troops on April 15, 1861. A number of Salem’s sons such as Julius A. Lineback refused to carry muskets, but enlisted as musicians in North Carolina’s regimental bands such as the all Moravian marching band attached to the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Infantry. At the same time, other young Moravian men set their pacifism aside and volunteered to serve in units such as the “Forsyth Rifles” led by Captain Alfred H. Belo, the son of a prominent Salem merchant, and outfitted by Francis H. Fries, a Salem Moravian and one of the state’s leading textile manufacturers. Moravian women on the homefront labored for the Southern cause as well, sewing flags and uniforms. In June 1861, Carrie Fries of Salem recognized that “we are all knitting” for the soldiers. Her sister Mollie worked with such fervor that “as soon as she finishes one thing she has another on the needles.” Likewise, outward displays of Confederate patriotism were en vogue in Salem in 1861, at least among the local elite. In September of that year, Mollie Fries “went to school with a ‘Confederate apron’ on…made of very bright colors, the three bars form the apron and the body is made of blue with twelve yellow stars in a circle.” Her father, Francis, admired “it

82 In general, Moravians, like other whites in the region, did not initially support secession. While some remained unconditional Unionists, many stepped in line behind the Confederacy following Lincoln’s call for troops on April 15, 1861. Also, like their neighbors, death and disaffection caused a substantial portion of the Moravian population to have to Unionism by mid-1863.
86 Carrie Fries [Salem] to J. F. Shaffner [in camp], September 9, 1861, in Ibid., 21.
exceedingly. He wanted her to wear it to church yesterday, but she was afraid she would disturb the congregation." 87

Though North Carolina Moravians were as “Southern” as their foothill neighbors, as members of a denomination that was peripheral, at best, to the Southern Orthodoxy, they could still be looked upon by some as anomalies. Adding to their curiosity, despite their acculturation and modernization, which were on par with any evangelical sect of the time, Southern Moravians maintained a strong sense of identity centered on their faith-community, and some continued to honor their pacifist principles in the 1860s. Unlike mainline Evangelicals who had severed ties with their national church conferences over a decade earlier, Southern Moravians enjoyed close ties with their northern brethren. Many “Salemites” claimed kin and community in Pennsylvania, and it was not unusual for young men, such as Charles F. Bahnson, to seek temporary work arrangements with relatives in the North. 88 Furthermore, Confederates feared that their religious dissent might encourage political dissent. Just as Moravian pacifism had caused their ancestors to avoid military service during the American Revolution—a choice that led to charges of disloyalty—Confederates were concerned that a commitment to nonviolence would compromise their dedication to the Southern war.

These peculiarities may have gone virtually unnoticed in peacetime; however, the Civil War caused pro-Confederates to question the Moravian community and its heritage of dissent with renewed concern. Anxieties that Moravians could be traitors situated in the heart of the Southern Confederacy allowed an overblown suspicion of Moravian Unionism to surface during the first year of the war. Most notably, in January 1862, an anonymously written article printed

88 Charles Bahnson left Salem at the age of 18 to study as a jeweler’s apprentice in Pennsylvania, Chapman, ed., Bright and Gloomy Days, xi-xii.
in the Richmond *Examiner* charged that the residents of the North Carolina foothills were largely “disloyal” to the Confederate cause. According to this “Traveler,” Forsyth County was the “hotbed of toryism. . . . the town of Salem is a Moravian settlement and, while the people are honest and worthy in the ordinary affairs of life, politically they are rotten to the core.”89 The writer insists that an informant from Salem recently confided that “he knew of persons in the community who were in correspondence with the Lincoln government.”90 Alluding that Moravians were compromising regional support, the writer insisted that their “unpatriotic spirit” was spilling into the non-Moravian town of Winston and perhaps the surrounding counties as well. If Confederate authorities did not promptly investigate and make arrests, the “Traveler” warned that portions of western North Carolina would be “another East Tennessee.”91

The “Traveler” certainly sensationalized his fears, but, in reality, they were not wholly unfounded. Most of the region’s inhabitants were unabashed Unionists, ardently opposed to secession, prior to April 15, 1861.92 Though Confederate war fever swept through Salem and the surrounding vicinity in the late spring of 1861, it was starting to lose its zest by the beginning of 1862. By this point, it appears that some were beginning to reconsider, rather critically, their

89 *North Carolina Standard*, January 15, 1862, reprinted from the January 11, 1862 Richmond *Examiner*.
90 Ibid.
91 The “Traveler” singled out Guilford, Randolph, Davidson, Forsyth, Davie, Yadkin, and Wilkes Counties in particular. Ibid.
92 Voters in this region overwhelmingly opposed secession. In February 1861, a vast majority of Forsyth County voters were against North Carolina holding a state secession convention. In neighboring Yadkin County, 1490 opposed the convention; only 34 favored it. Similarly, in Wilkes County, 1890 voters were against holding a convention, while 51 were in favor of it. Other counties in the region produced similar results. See election returns in Marc W. Krumen, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 276-78. At the same time, Unionists in the North Carolina upcountry organized grassroots “Union Meetings” as a show of their opposition to secession. Unionists in Surry County resolved that Lincoln’s election was not “sufficient cause for the dismemberment of the best government vouchsafed by God to man” and hoped that “through the patriotism of the people, peace and harmony may be restored to the country and the bonds of our national Union preserved.” “Union Meeting in Surry County,” *North Carolina Standard*, January 23, 1861. Similarly, a Yadkin County resident remarked that opposition to the secession convention was held by “nine-tenths of the Democrats in this County and by all the Union men. . .Principles are eternal, but the old parties have ceased to exist.” “Yadkin County,” *North Carolina Standard*, March 20, 1861. In Forsyth County, an “enthusiastic Union meeting, irrespective of old party ties, was held in the courthouse in Winston.” “Union Meeting in Forsyth,” *North Carolina Standard*, April, 17 1861.
Confederate patriotism. The same month that the *Examiner* published the article in question, a “Miss L” studying at the Salem Female Academy informed Moravians back home in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania that “the mass of people [in Salem] are still attached to the Union.” Furthermore, the outbreak of sectional warfare did not sever the bond of Christian community that American Moravians, on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line, shared. When possible, Southern Moravians corresponded with, and occasionally visited, their kin and community in Pennsylvania between 1861 and 1865. Perhaps knowledge of this North-South network heightened the “Traveler’s” concerns that Moravians had political allies beyond the Confederacy.

Moravians, however, were not the only group of upcountry Protestants that Confederates charged with disloyalty. Confederates often looked upon Southern Christians in general who chose to worship outside of the Southern Evangelical establishment with suspicion, and at times outright contempt. Their paranoia occasionally pushed some Confederate fanatics to lash out, at times with violence. Most particularly, Confederates feared that the upcountry’s Anabaptists, Quakers, and Wesleyan Methodists, those Protestants whose fundamental philosophies were grounded in overt socioreligious dissent, would naturally reject the Confederate effort, either out of a dedication to religious pacifism, or perhaps even out of faith-based abolitionist principles. Ultimately Confederates feared that religious diversity in the upcountry would compromise, or in fact, was compromising, region-wide support for the Southern war effort. As with Moravians, Confederate reservations concerning others outside of the Southern Orthodoxy were not entirely baseless. Anabaptists, Quakers, and Wesleyan Methodists often rejected the Southern Confederacy as an innately unholy experiment, and many refused to cooperate with the Confederate government from the war’s inception.

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93 Quoted from an article entitled “Returned from the South,” by “Miss L,” in the *Moravian* (Bethlehem, PA), Jan. 9, 1862, in Chapman, *Bright and Gloomy Days*, xxxix.
Quakers and Anabaptists were noted opponents of slavery and often Unionists as well. However, it was primarily their pacifism that caused Confederates to charge them with disloyalty during the Civil War. Committed to nonviolence, Quaker and Anabaptist men routinely refused to cooperate with the Confederate Conscription Act, the first of which the Richmond government passed in April 1862. In the months that followed, Southern authorities began using force to press members of pacifist denominations into Confederate service. Yet objectors routinely pushed back. When a Confederate detail came to the home of David Grove to claim him for service, the Mennonite refused to remain in his saddle. Finally his irritated captors decided to transport him by wagon. In a similar circumstance, another local Mennonite, Gabriel Heatwole, informed the officers who arrested him that they would have to kill him before he agreed to fight.94 Due to their resistance, Confederate authorities oftentimes used intimidation to compel objectors to comply. For instance, once in custody, officials threatened to drown a group of Quaker conscripts from North Carolina if they continued to disobey orders. Similarly, Confederates nearly hanged Joseph Dixon, an elder at the Cane Creek Meeting in Alamance County.95 Though they eventually let the elder go, Confederates murdered his son sometime following, presumably for evading the military draft. Likewise, in an equally sadistic show, Confederate officers placed Isaiah Macon and perhaps other Quakers at the head of the regiment as they marched into Federal fire at the battle of Winchester. Macon, a husband and father who officers would not allow to see his family before they sent him to the front, survived the battle, but was captured and died while in Federal custody at Point Lookout.96

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95 Dating to the 1740s, Cane Creek was the first Quaker meeting established in the North Carolina Piedmont. It is located in the community of Snow Hill.
Intimidation left some conscientious objectors with little option but to buckle under pressure. When William B. Hockett “refused the gun,” Confederate officials presented him with the option of being executed that evening or the following morning. Announcing that “neither” option sounded appealing, Hockett reluctantly entered the Confederate ranks and served on the Virginia front until Union forces captured him and imprisoned him at Fort Delaware. North Carolinian Isaac Harvey also hesitantly joined the Confederate ranks. After being conscripted into service, Harvey “became discouraged” and “took the gun.”\(^97\) Though the decision required the church to revoke his membership, it hardly mattered as Harvey would never return. Harvey lost his life fighting in a war in which he was morally and religiously opposed.

Perhaps more often, however, religious objectors who refused to comply with conscription faced incarceration in Confederate prisons. Most served in either Salisbury Prison, a former textile mill on the edge of Quaker country in the North Carolina Piedmont, or Castle Thunder, a tobacco warehouse-turned-prison in Richmond which served as a holding spot for a variety of political prisoners from the fall of 1862 until the end of the war.\(^98\) Despite their trials, imprisoned conscientious objectors such as eighteen year old Elias Reeke and his friend Haley Sills maintained that their Christian principles prohibited them from bearing arms against their fellow man.\(^99\) Those unwavering pacifists who suffered imprisonment made clear that they would prefer to be chastised by human agents on earth, than to slip into temptation and be rebuked by God for an eternity. Tennessean Tilghman Vestal prayed that his captors would set him free. Yet, he imagined that the jail sentence and harassment that he bared would serve as a

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\(^{97}\) Ibid.
\(^{99}\) Delphina E. Mendenhall [Jamestown, Guilford County, N.C.] to John B. Crenshaw, September 9, 1862, in John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC. The John B. Crenshaw Papers from 1862-1865 are filled with numerous examples.
testament to God and man of his Christian commitment to nonviolence. Convictions such as these allowed religious objectors to attach religious significance to their earthly plights. Though he willfully embraced incarceration as a show of his faith, Vestal also believed that God perhaps willed him to atone in jail for his initial complicity in the war. Though he never shouldered a musket, upon being drafted, Vestal mustered with his regiment, albeit with “unpleasant feelings.” Willing to bear the cross of his own sin, Vestal thought, “God forgive is my prayer.”

Likewise, pointing to the Book of Acts, Jesse Frazier imagined that the imprisonment of Southern Quakers by Southern authorities was similar to the imprisonment of Paul and Silas, both Roman citizens, by Roman authorities. Just as Paul had insisted that he would remain in jail until the guilty magistrates personally escorted him out of his cell, Frazier held that Quakers should make a demand for Confederate authorities to “come theselfs and fetch us out [sic]”

Due to the lobbying of a few prominent conscientious objectors such as Quakers John and Judith Crenshaw and Dunkard Elder John Kline, in the fall of 1862 the Richmond government passed an Exemption Act. The act allowed conscripted men who were documented members of a Quaker or Anabaptist church to either report to duty, furnish a substitute, or pay an exemption fee of $500. While the terms satisfied many, they troubled others who had moral misgivings about aiding the war effort in any way. Tennessee Quaker Tilghman Vestal, for example, refused to hire a substitute or pay the tax, as those were terms he considered “nearly equel [sic] to doing service.” Instead, he hoped to “act as nearly like our savior as I knew.”

Other objectors who interpreted the fee as a lesser of three evils, grudgingly agreed to pay. After paying the exemption fee in 1863, Tennessee Quaker Wayne Perry confided to his diary that he

100 Diary of Tilghman Vestal Diary, Part I, John B. Crenshaw, FHC.
101 Diary of Tilghman Vestal, Part I, pp. 101-102, in Ibid.
102 Jesse Frazier [Newmarket] to Solomon Frazier [Salisbury Confederate Prison], February 2, 1865, in Solomon Frazier Letters, FHC.
103 Diary of Tilghman Vestal, Part I, pp. 11 & 53, John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC
did so against his better judgment, “for I doo beelev that it is not wright for friends to pay as we
doo have our testimony aginst war for war is not cnzista [consistent] with the will of Christ if
we beleve his sermon on the mount [sic].” 104  Still, other pacifists were less conflicted, or even
encouraged by the law. Virginia Quakers, John and Judith Crenshaw, were leading advocates of
military exemptions for conscientious objectors in 1862. Lobbying in 1862 for a clause to the
Conscription Act, “John B. Crenshaw & wife” drew upon Antiquities of the Jews, written by first
century religious scholar Josephus, to remind the Richmond government that Rome had released
the Jews of Ephesus from military duty due to their “superstitions.” 105  Moreover, some Quakers
and Anabaptists interpreted the Exemption Act as Divine intervention. John E. Pretlow and
other Quaker conscripts from Virginia believed that the $500 tax was “a way of escape” God was
making available to his most devoted subjects. 106  Dunkard Elder John Kline interpreted the act
similarly, insisting in January 1863 that religious objectors “must look upon our exemption from
army service as one proof of those interpositions in behalf of his children which our heavenly
Father has promised, and which he is constantly fulfilling.” 107

Though Quakers’ and Anabaptists’ pacifism could make them targets of persecution
during the Civil War, it was Wesleyan Methodists’ stance on slavery that caused Confederates to
look upon them with particular disdain. As self-proclaimed abolitionists who refused to
associate with the proslavery Methodist Episcopal Church, South, some Southerners charged
Wesleyans with disloyalty toward the South as early as the 1840s and 1850s. Of course,

104  Diary of Nathan Perry in Wayne C. Allman, Pioneer Friends Preachers (Columbus, GA: Brentwood Christian
Press, 1996). 36
105  James Pinkney Pleasant Bell, Out Quaker Friends of Ye Olden Time: Being in Part a Transcript of the Minute
Books of Cedar Creek Meeting, Hanover County, and the South River Meeting, Campbell County, VA (Lynchburg,
VA: J.P. Bell Company, 1905), 269.
106  Memoir of John E. Pretlow, John E. Pretlow Paper, FHC.
107  Diary of John Kline, January 1, 1863, in Benjamin Funk, ed., Life and Labors of Elder John Kline, the Martyr
Missionary: Collated from His Diary (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1900),
upcountry Wesleyans never questioned their own “Southern” identity; instead, they questioned mainline Methodists’ dedication to the teachings of John Wesley. Yet, their socioreligious dissent became more urgent during the Civil War as Confederates feared that Wesleyanism could turn the already disaffected masses against the slaveocracy currently in command in the South. Suggesting the breadth of concern, in 1863 a Reverend J. H. Coble informed E. J. Hale & Sons, the publishers of the *Fayetteville Observer*, a pro-Confederate newspaper published in eastern North Carolina, that portions of central and northwestern North Carolina were under threat.

> “Throughout the whole of that district, there are whole communities dotted here & there that are thoroughly abolitionized. wherever they [the Wesleyan ministers] went, those Emissaries poisoned the mind of the poor & illiterate. . . . Those people, scattered from Chatham to Surry, read the New York Tribune before the war. They were in favor of Lincoln's election. They wanted a Lincoln Electoral ticket. . . . Go into their houses today & you will find the Tribune & other abolition Journals pasted as wallpaper in their rooms. . . . [They] are as rabid abolitionists as can be found in Massachusetts or Ohio.”

Though an anti-Confederate spirit was certainly evident in this strip of the North Carolina Piedmont by 1863, in reality, Coble’s fear of an abolitionist plot was more paranoia than truth. No doubt that religious dissent characterized the region, but the Wesleyan denomination never attracted the upcountry masses. Nevertheless, Confederate fears caused the meaning of Wesleyan Methodism to transform during the Civil War. No longer just a threat to the Southern socioreligious order, some began to perceive of it as a very real threat to the survival of the Confederate nation.

Anxiety over the existence of a Wesleyan Methodist conspiracy to spread abolitionism and Unionism among the masses was enough to ignite a backlash against members of the church.

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The panic was particularly evident among Confederates in North Carolina’s central Piedmont, the most active Wesleyan district in the upcountry. Writing to an associate in 1864, the enrolling officer for Montgomery County “fear[ed] [that] you have no idea of the feeling in this county. . . . If you believe me two third[s] of the county are Lincoln men, they would vote today for Abe Lincoln.” Though Wesleyans were hardly the only anti-Confederates in the vicinity, Confederates occasionally singled them out as a source of dissent. The harassment at times became violent. Perhaps most notable, in January 1865 Confederate Home Guard apprehended and killed four young men, all members of Lovejoy Wesleyan Methodist Church, for their refusal to comply with the Conscription Act. The Justice of the Peace sentenced the conscripts, brothers Jessie, John, and William Hulins, and their cousin, James Atkins, to jail. However, following their trial, a “murderous squad” apprehended the victims and dragged them to nearby Buck Mountain where they executed them in the snow. As a Hulins descendant wrote years later, “The only offense the boys were guilty of was: they obeyed their conscience, which is the only personal contact we have with God.” Undoubtedly true, but Wesleyan Methodists were not outright pacifists like their Quaker neighbors. Most likely, Atkins’s and the Hulins brothers’ “conscience” precluded them from supporting a Confederacy devoted to maintaining the power and wealth of the elite at the expense of Southern blacks and common whites.

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112 It is still reasonable to assume that some upcountry Wesleyans were pacifists, particularly those who claimed Quaker roots. Yet it does not appear that the Wesleyan Church pushed pacifism any more than other branches of the Methodist Church.
In reality, Wesleyan Methodists were not unlike many of their upcountry neighbors who had no interest in supporting a war waged by, and for, the wealthy slaveocracy. Wesleyans were undoubtedly opposed to slavery on a moral level. However, as “poor” people, they were also conscious of class inequities, perhaps mostly suspicious of elites who benefitted from slave labor while they labored honestly with little material reward in comparison. The Civil War only served to heighten this ground-level animosity as the Confederate Government passed measures that many found favored the rich. Thus, it was in the spirit of a disaffected yeoman, rather than that of an ardent abolitionist, that Wesleyan Methodist, John A. Beaman, relayed his wartime grievances to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance. Particularly angered that the government was exempting some professions from military service, near the end of 1863, Beaman, a non-exempted farmer and blacksmith, informed Vance:

“the farmer is the life of hour country and I want you to tell me one farmer exempted [unless] he has twenty slaves and I want you to tell me one of them that has any thing to sell that will sell for confedrt money. . . . I hav mad moor corn and mor wheat and more bacon than any slave holder in the confedret stats for sale, and I hav dun more smithin than any smith in hour county--for nothin acordin to my fose and yet I must go to fight for the seeceders. . . . Mr. Vance, I want you to send me some exemptations for I am doing no good at tall for they want me to go to fight and I am bound not to go unless all the rest of the black smiths and manufactors does”

Still, Beaman’s religious and moral proclivities lay just beneath the surface of his class-based defense. Though he never mentioned his religious affiliation to Governor Vance, and with good reason, his association with the Wesleyan Methodist church required him to wear his antislavery

113 “Poor” did not necessarily mean destitute. Rather it was a relative term which described those who were not wealthy. This ranged from middling yeomen to those without land. Wesleyan Methodists Micajah and Phoebe McPherson (both 49 years of age) were yeomen who owned their own farm in 1860. In 1860 they valued their real estate at $1000 and their personal estate at $645. Wesleyans Valentine and Lucy Moore (53 and 55 respectively) owned $500 in real estate and $300 in personal property. John and Linda Beaman, who attended the same Wesleyan Methodist church, had less. Still, at 26 years old they farmed their own land. In 1860 they valued their real estate at $50 and their personal estate at $150. Eighth Census of the U.S., 1860:, Chatham County, N.C., Population Schedule.

114 John A. Beaman to Governor Vance, November 20-24, 1863, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
principles on his sleeve. Beaman’s religious choice made clear that he found slavery to be counter to Christian ethics. But as his letter to Governor Vance demonstrates, he was acutely aware that he too occupied a space in the margins of Southern society. Without doubt, Beaman’s contempt for the Confederacy and the slaveowning class, as well as his religious opposition to slavery, were rolled into one.

During the Civil War, religious diversity in the upland South weakened the Southern war effort and helped compromise Confederate nationalism over time. Single handedly, Wesleyan Methodists and other dissenting Protestants presented only a minor threat to Confederate solidarity. Yet, when taken together, the mass of religious dissenters in the upcountry formed a significant show of homegrown opposition to the Confederacy, perhaps not immediately, but certainly by late 1863. Though religious dissenters never perceived themselves as a cohesive unit, opposition to the Confederate effort traversed denominational boundaries and eventually filled many upcountry Protestants with a common anti-Confederate spirit. Though they did not always share identical motives—factors including antislavery, pacifism, and class anxieties were all at play—their universal rejection of the Southern cause was enough for a diverse array of Protestants to structure an anti-Confederate community that stretched throughout the upcountry and beyond.

It is important, however, to reemphasize the complexity of religious dissent in the upcountry. As will be discussed in the following chapter, shared wartime experiences brought upcountry Protestants closer together. But while the process served to weaken the denominational divide, it did not help Protestants reach religious consensus. Even Protestants claiming a common denominational heritage oftentimes disagreed over the fundamentals of their faith, as heated debates then occurring within folk Baptist churches over the legitimacy of
mission work and other issues make clear. Thus, the war may have compromised ecclesiastical boundaries, at least temporarily, but it did not cause them to evaporate. Likewise, opposition to the Confederacy may have allowed a diverse array of Protestants to find similarities, whether religiously, socially, or politically. But uncovering common ground did not require them to forge a universal agreement as to what constitutes Christian responsibility and Biblical Truth. Instead, Protestants found, and would continue to find, the Truth in their own conscience and interpretation of Scripture, yet, at times perhaps, with more tolerance moving forward.

Additionally, it is crucial to note that religious dissent did not always translate neatly into political dissent, and that people’s actions were not always consistent with the religious principles they professed. Most Virginia Anabaptists, for instance, remained committed to pacifism and attached to the Union they believed was ordained by God. Shenandoah Valley Mennonite, Jacob Hildebrand, however, was an enthusiastic Confederate, whose son, despite his Anabaptist upbringing, volunteered to fight for slavery and secession. Other professed pacifists volunteered to fight in the war as well, including a number of Unionist Quakers from Loudoun County, Virginia who helped organize the Loudoun Rangers, a cavalry unit organized to conduct raids on Confederates in the region. In reverse, those who associated with the mainstream establishment, such as Virginia Episcopalian John M. Botts, at times ignored the Southern Orthodoxy’s blessing of the Confederacy and acted instead according to their own conscience. These micro examples may be exceptions rather than the rule. Yet they suggest that one’s religious association did not necessarily trump individual conscience.

Yet, taking a step back, several generalizations regarding denomination and Unionism can be made. Members of denominations rooted in pacifism and antislavery were more likely than other Southern Protestants to reject the Confederacy from its inception. Out of a religious commitment to nonviolence, Anabaptists and Quakers made clear that they would not embrace a war for disunion. So too did Wesleyan Methodists, though it was their moral opposition to slavery and class consciousness that kept them from supporting a cause that benefitted the wealthy while keeping others in bondage, both metaphorically and real. At the same time, a heritage of religious dissent hardly prevented many folk Protestants and Moravians from supporting the Confederacy early on. While some would remain devoted Confederates, many others would lose their ardor. For them, their particular brand of faith influenced their gradual opposition to the Southern war effort, beginning in earnest in 1862. Some folk Protestants, for instance, determined as the war pressed on that Secessionists in league with Satan had duped them into a most unholy affair. Desperately struggling to purify their souls, they renounced the Confederacy and began disassociating themselves as much as possible from the leaders they deemed responsible for secession and war. Meanwhile, the harsh realities of ongoing war caused many Southern Moravians to recommit themselves to their denomination’s peace principles and become ardent supporters of the state’s Peace Movement beginning in 1863.

Rejection of the Confederacy redefined religious dissent between 1861 and 1865, as those who worshiped outside of the Southern Orthodoxy became enemies of the state, albeit some more decisively than others. This occasionally played out violently on the local level and in the military ranks as overzealous Confederates assumed the responsibility of rebuking those they deemed disloyal to the Southern government and its war effort. But perhaps more often, anti-Confederate Protestants of all stripes found sympathetic company among the disaffected
masses on the local homefront. In the spirit of interdenominationalism, upcountry Protestants worked together during the Civil War, often refashioning preexisting religious structures and networks for political purposes. Moravians and Quakers, for instance, utilized their faith-based community structure to aid rising opposition to the Confederacy. Ties of kinship and community, including those that linked Wachovia to Pennsylvania, and the Piedmont to the Midwest, took on renewed political significance during the Civil War as Southern Moravians and Quakers used their network of associates, local and abroad, to further their anti-Confederate efforts. In time, parts of the upcountry South, portions of North Carolina in particular, became a hub of anti-Confederate activism, as Southern Moravians, Quakers, and other anti-Confederate Protestants joined together in opposition to the Confederate cause
CHAPTER V

“PRAY TO GOD TO BRING THIS UNHOLY WAR TO A CLOSE”: RELIGIOUS NETWORKS & INTERDENOMINATIONAL ACTIVISM

After April 1862, disaffected upcountry residents become progressively convinced that the Confederate cause was an unholy effort designed to destroy the Almighty’s blessed nation. Realizing that they had been led into sin by Secessionists and wartime fanatics, disillusioned Southerners resolved to redeem their souls by renouncing the Confederacy and returning to the side of God. The transition was largely psychological. Wartime measures such as conscription and impressment pushed many Southerners to revert to Unionism, but left them with little choice but to resign to the Confederate government their bodies and provisions. Still, anti-Confederates were not wholly passive, particularly in the upcountry where a collective of activists launched a counterinsurgency on the homefront. Aiding their efforts were decades-old religious and community networks, associations within and without the South which helped foster political dissent and made organized anti-Confederate activism all the more feasible. At the same time, upcountry Protestants continued to build upon their heritage of religious and community cooperation, yet with newfound fervor amidst the tumult of war. During the Civil War, interdenominationalism took on renewed political significance, especially in the upcountry where a variety of Protestants ranging from Moravians to Primitive Baptists cooperated in anti-Confederate initiatives that were oftentimes religious in nature.
During the Civil War, Confederate sympathizers occasionally criticized Quakers for what they deemed political disobedience. However, upcountry Southerners who lived in the vicinity of Quaker settlements often professed differently. In places such as the Yadkin Valley where Quaker-folk Protestant cooperation was a part of daily routine, anti-Confederate sentiment ran high and wartime politics did little to marginalize local Friends. Instead, Quakerism continued to influence the local socioreligious atmosphere. Rather than being cast out, Quakers and their neighbors continued to interact in religious and secular spaces as they always had. This is not to imply that political differences were not present on the Yadkin Valley homefront. To the contrary, divisions were so evident that they occasionally resulted in violence. Yet this only served to bring likeminded Protestants, regardless of denomination, even closer together. The war, in fact, reaffirmed the strength of this locally distinctive Quaker-folk Protestant coalition, an institution forged over generations, and bound by ties of kinship and community, not separated by denominational boundaries.

Wartime correspondence sheds light on the breadth of the immediate Quaker community in the upcountry, suggesting that it included official church members, as well as a host of affiliates who were not on the roll book of any particular monthly meeting. These affiliates were, in effect, half-way Quakers who claimed some type of association with the denomination and its parishioners, but were, for one reason or another, not church members themselves.¹ Some of these were probably birthright Quakers, individuals who had been born into the faith, 

¹ Halfway Quakers were associated with the denomination through family or community ties. Some were “birthright” Quakers (individuals who had been born to Quaker parents), but were no longer members for whatever reason. Some likely chose to leave, perhaps for another denomination. However, it was not unusual for a monthly meeting to disown a member for marrying outside of the faith, an act that occurred rather often in North Carolina Quaker counties. Nevertheless, it appears that no real stigma was attached to those who left the faith in otherwise good standing. One could become a full member again after disownment. Even if one chose not to apply for full membership, they were still permitted to attend church services, and they were in no way shunned from their social or religious community. As various sources examined in this dissertation indicate, they often held fast to Quaker ideals.
who had chosen another religious path but still associated with and were still socially connected to their former community. Evidence suggests that individuals who regularly worshipped and associated with Quakers often defined themselves as such—and were defined that way by others—even if no official claim of membership had been made. Halfway membership may have seemed of little consequence in peacetime; however, it created a problem in wartime for those conscripted into Confederate service. Men such as Haley Sills of East Tennessee who had “lived among Friends” for most of their lives and considered themselves pacifists, found it difficult to claim a religious exemption from service without the appropriate paperwork.  

Affidavits and depositions gathered by John B. Crenshaw, a Virginia Quaker who dedicated himself to helping religious objectors legally avoid military service, indicate that the men in parts of the North Carolina Piedmont, the hub of Southern Quakerism, were the most likely to encounter this predicament. Young men including Minus Hinshaw, who regularly attended services at Marlborough Monthly Meeting in Randolph County, and Thomas A. Blair, who “was brought up under the influence of the society of Friends” in neighboring Guilford County, relied on local Quakers in good standing to affirm their affiliation with the church.  

Though Blair had not joined the society, the clerk of Springfield Monthly Meeting in neighboring Guilford County

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2 Delphina E. Mendenhall [Jamestown, Guilford County, N.C.] to John B. Crenshaw, September 9, 1862, in John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC.

3 Affidavit affirming Thomas A. Blair’s association with the Quaker faith, signed by Joash Reynolds, Clerk of Springfield Monthly Meeting, May 19, 1863, in John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC; and Affidavit affirming Minus Hinshaw’s association with the Quaker faith, signed by Isaac Lee, Clerk of Marlborough Monthly Meeting, May 7, 1863, in Ibid. Hinshaw was a former member of Marlborough Monthly Meeting, who despite losing his official status appears to have been in good standing with his community. It is possible that the meeting disowned Hinshaw for marrying outside of the faith. He married Mary Bowers in Randolph County, NC in 1849 and was buried in 1906 in the cemetery of New Salem United Methodist Church in the same county. Randolph County North Carolina Cemeteries, Index for New Salem United Methodist Church, Cemetery Census Online, http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/rand/cem008.htm (accessed Jan. 29, 2013).
attested in 1863 that Blair had married a Quaker and that he was, furthermore, confident that Blair held Quaker principles.\textsuperscript{4}

But, as discussed in chapter one, Quakers were also part of a larger local community that was interdenominational in composition. Sharing a common geographic space, these were cherished neighbors who had become intimate over years of interaction and cooperation. They were individuals who sensed a mutual responsibility to one another, something Quakers took particularly seriously as they strived to live by the Biblical command to “love thy neighbor.” Thus, moving forward in the Christian commitment to help those in need, during the war Quakers at times attempted to use their clout to assist community members outside of the immediate Quaker fold. After April 1862, for instance, Quakers tried to secure military exemptions for non-Quaker neighborhood men conscripted into Confederate military service. In May 1863, for example, John Branson of Randolph County petitioned for the exemption of W. Riley Nease, a recently conscripted “neighbor of mine.” Presumably Nease was not a Quaker as Branson never implied that he was a conscientious objector.\textsuperscript{5} Instead Branson appealed to the conscript’s character, describing him as “a very industrious man” who maintained his farm without hired help. Surely Branson wanted to help his neighbor who it can be assumed was not enthusiastic about his call to service, but he was expressly concerned about the wellbeing of the conscript’s wife and three children. More than likely a family that Branson encountered often in

\textsuperscript{4} Affidavit affirming Thomas A. Blair’s association with the Quaker faith, May 19, 1863, John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC.

\textsuperscript{5} It is possible that Nease belonged to the Lutheran or German Reformed church. The Neases were among the first German families to settle in the area around Randolph County. Upon arriving in the area sometime between 1745 and 1760, German immigrants established a union German Reformed and Lutheran church. Rev. G. William Welker, “History of the German Reformed Church in North Carolina,” in William Saunders, ed. The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Vol. VIII (Raleigh: P.M. Hale, Printer to the State, 1886 ), 727-757.
the neighborhood and probably knew well, he was concerned how the family would survive if the head of household was “taken to the army.”

At the same time, the religious impulse to relieve suffering could be challenging for pacifists unwilling to assist the war effort, at least voluntarily. In November 1862, a Mrs. M. B. Moore of Stokes County informed Governor Vance of North Carolina that Quaker women in her region were stockpiling blankets rather than sending them to the troops, something she believed to be “the duty of Southern women.” Though Moore acknowledged that the Quaker women she knew were often “of Union sentiment,” she believed that their religious commitment to nonviolence was the primary barrier in this situation. In effect, she implied that Quakers in Stokes County were as concerned with the welfare of local men in the field as anyone else. Though Moore herself does not appear to have been a member of the Society of Friends, the evidence suggests that she was familiar with members of the Quaker community. Ultimately, she suggested to Vance that impressing blankets would relieve Quaker women of their moral dilemma, by allowing them to assist their neighbors—presumably men and boys in which they were well acquainted—without “violating the rules of their order.”

Quakers and their neighbors, however, were not simply tied into a local or regional network. As discussed in chapter two, a Quaker exodus from the “den of slavery,” still in progress after four decades, allowed parts of the Midwest to, in effect, become extensions of the

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6 John Branson [New Salem, Randolph County, N.C.] to John B. Crenshaw, May 22, 1863, in John B. Crenshaw Papers, FHC. That same day, ten other Randolph County Quakers sent a separate petition to Jefferson Davis asking that W. Riley Nease be allowed to stay home for “he has a wife and 3 small children and no person to work on the farm but himself to support his family.” D.S. Channess, Nathan Watkins, L.H. Piggott, David Shepard, Anthony Channess, Miles Channess, William L. Wilson, Hiram Wilson, William Channess, and Robert Hanner [Randolph County, N.C.] to Jefferson Davis, May 22, 1863, in Ibid..

7 Moore insisted that “In the counties of Randolph & Guilford, you will find blankets most abundant. In Montgomery, Davidson, Forsythe, Stokes, Rockingham, etc. you will find some.” M. B. Moore [Pine Hall] to Gov. Vance, November 7, 1862, Gov. Vance Papers, NCDAH.
upcountry South. This network which linked places such as Randolph County, North Carolina to Randolph County, Indiana had been political for decades, as Quakers including Levi and Catherine Coffin helped escaped slaves move toward freedom along the Underground Railroad. But the Civil War expanded its political significance, as Quakers utilized the vast network to help non-Quaker acquaintances flee the South. Working in concert with their Southern brethren, Midwestern Quakers opened their doors to upcountry émigrés who needed a temporary safe haven during the war. Most were men hoping to avoid Confederate conscription. After the war, Addison Coffin, himself a Quaker and upcountry expatriate, remembered that “In wartime Indiana it was . . . rare . . . for a [former] Carolina family not to have one or more of the refugees working for them.” The arrangement could be equally advantageous for Midwestern families who were coping with homefront struggles of their own, most evidently a wartime shortage of farmhands and mechanics. Coffin insisted that refugees “from North Carolina and Tennessee . . . were of immense benefit to the country in Ohio, Indiana, [and] Illinois, for they took the place of the men who had joined the Union army.” Because their skills and labor were in high demand, “the refugees received good wages,” and Addison opined that “when the war closed [many] were better off in money” than they ever had been. Upcountry men may have utilized the Quaker network most often, but women and children could leave all behind and brave the journey as well. Coffin recalled that some male émigrés wanted their “families and friends . . . brought to

8 Quoted from Daniel Worth to “brother”, May 17, 1860, Daniel Worth Papers, SHC. Worth was a former North Carolina Quaker who, upon relocating to Indiana, joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church.
10 Addison Coffin, Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, Written by Himself (Cleveland: William G. Hubbard, 1897), 125.
“Indiana.” Pulling from his experience on the Underground Railroad, at some point during the war Coffin traveled to North Carolina and returned with “a company of fifty passengers, mostly women and children” hoping to reunite with their husbands and fathers.\textsuperscript{11} More than likely this was an isolated event; attempting to evacuate the South during the Civil War could be dangerous.

Journeying to the Midwest was a particularly risky undertaking for Southern men of conscription age. In peacetime, traveling five hundred miles over mountains and rivers was no easy jaunt, even with “a good saddle.”\textsuperscript{12} But it became especially tenuous for wartime sojourners who had to move undetected and often at night. In December 1864, for example, a group of Yadkin Valley conscripts deserted their regiment in hopes of reaching Rush County, Indiana “by way of East Tennessee.” Waiting in Indiana were relatives of David W. Worth, one of the escapees and the youngest son in an influential Quaker family in the North Carolina foothills. Unfortunately, as the young men were making their escape, a Confederate patrol captured Worth and sent him to Castle Thunder where he was imprisoned for two weeks before returning to the field under close guard. At least some of his compatriots, however, appear to have been more fortunate. Soon after the incident, Worth received information that three Gilmer brothers, Methodists from the local community, had reached Indiana and were presumably in safekeeping with his extended family.\textsuperscript{13} Though the extent of the friendship between Worth and the Gilmers is unknown, it can be assumed by the risk they took together that it was solid, likely

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] Ibid., 128-129.
\item[12] Ibid., 124-125. Coffin traveled frequently between the upcountry and the Midwest. He insisted that “the distance from Richmond, Ind. To New Garden, N.C. [was] over 500 miles.” Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
a friendship forged through shared experiences growing up together in the same community. Perhaps even the bond was strongest between Worth and the middle Gilmer brother, James, who were both the same age.  

Suppositions aside, Worth and the Gilmers were certainly no strangers as their families, both of which were relatively prosperous and prominent within the local community, were acquainted.

A few months before David Worth and the Gilmer brothers left for Indiana, another set of upcountry residents developed a similar plan, yet one that was much grander in scale. In the summer of 1864 a force of over one hundred and thirty Yadkin Valley men coordinated an effort to reach acquaintances in the Midwest. The men all “started together” on Sunday, July 10, 1864, yet soon divided in hopes of making it through the mountains undetected. Eventually, Confederate guards interrupted their progress, capturing and imprisoning some of the fugitives, while causing others to become “scattered.” But by the end of August, forty-eight of the evacuees had safely reached Westfield, Indiana, a Quaker settlement founded in the 1830s by upcountry émigrés who most certainly named their new home after Westfield Monthly Meeting in Surry County, North Carolina. A complete list of the escapees does not exist. Some may have been Quakers in good standing. But it appears that others like Sandy Vestal and Enoch

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14 In 1864 David Worth and James Gilmer were both twenty-two years of age. The other two Gilmer brothers were close in age as well, Jeremy being twenty-five and William being twenty. Seventh Census of the U.S., 1850: Surry County, N.C., Population Schedule; Eighth Census of the U.S., 1860: Surry County, N.C. Interestingly, James had just graduated as valedictorian from the University of North Carolina. “The Sixty-Seventh Commencement at Chapel Hill,” North Carolina Standard, June, 8 1864.

15 Robert S. Gilmer and Job Worth, the fathers of the young men in question, worked together as community leaders in Surry County, North Carolina. For instance, in June 1865 Gilmer and Worth worked together in a committee to draft resolutions proclaiming allegiance to the Union. Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, RL.

Brown could have been halfway Quakers, perhaps not full members of a monthly meeting, but certainly associated with the faith and its immediate community through ties of kinship.\textsuperscript{17} Still, many more, including “the Willard boys” who evidence suggests were members of nearby Mount Pleasant Methodist Church, were not affiliated with the Quaker church directly.\textsuperscript{18} Nonetheless, they were part of the interdenominational community that thrived in the Yadkin Valley, an association that bound them to their Quaker neighbors and linked them to Quaker settlements in the Midwest as well.\textsuperscript{19} The important truth, however, is that whether one was a Methodist, a bona fide Quaker, or a former member, perhaps disowned for marrying outside of the faith, hardly mattered to those involved. On the ground level, they identified as “Yadkin fellas,” community members with shared convictions and experiences cooperating together just as they had for years.\textsuperscript{20}

It was in the spirit of unity that “Yadkin fellas” engaged in what birthright Quaker William Dobbins described as “a pretty smart fight” with local militia before fleeing to Union lines in February 1863.\textsuperscript{21} The contingent included local Quakers and others who had been evading the draft on the homefront. Once snow began to fall they congregated in a “Quaker school” near Deep Creek Friends Meeting in Yadkinville.\textsuperscript{22} Ironically, it was there in the Quaker church, a sanctuary of nonviolence, that they exchanged gunfire with local Confederates before

\textsuperscript{17} The Vestals and the Browns were founding members of Deep Creek Monthly Meeting in Yadkin County, North Carolina. However, Sandy Vestal and Enoch Brown were not apparent in the records for Yadkin County. See “Deep Creek Monthly Meeting” in William Wade Hinshaw, ed., \textit{Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy}, Vol. I, North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1936), 971.

\textsuperscript{18} Years later a Willard descendent reported that his family were all members of Mount Pleasant Methodist Church in Yadkin County. Casstevens, \textit{The Civil War in Yadkin County}, 90.


\textsuperscript{20} Quoted from, M.F. Farington [Westfield, Indiana] to Jesse Dobbins, August 28, 1864. Jesse and William Dobbins Papers, FHC.


\textsuperscript{22} The site is locally referred to as the Bond Schoolhouse; however, period correspondence generally referred to a Quaker school, or the “Quaker school meeting house.” Postwar diary of Jesse Dobbins [1865?], in Speer, ed., \textit{Voices from Cemetery Hill}, 214-215.
fleeing west toward the Blue Ridge. Their desperate effort underscores the bond between likeminded neighbors, “County boys,” according to birthright Quaker Jesse Virgil Dobbins, who, despite his Quaker principles, chose to fight back rather than submit to a cause in which he was fundamentally opposed. But also important, it makes clear that for some Southern Quakers, pacifism had its limits. The decision to put their peace principles on the shelf was certainly not easy for the Dobbins brothers and presumably for others in their gang. Neither was leaving the South. After the war, Jesse recalled that it was “a hard trial” leaving his “loving wife and two dear little helpless children” behind, and traveling on foot through the mountains at night, undetected and in freezing temperatures. Yet, as his diary infers, his conscience directed him to fight on the side of the righteous, rather than submit to injustice. He may have been a Quaker, but he was also an American patriot with a duty to God and country. An ardent Unionist, Dobbins concluded that he “was willing to join the United States army for the purpose of fighting for the Libertys of my Dear country that is more precious than gold.” Thus, rather than sitting out the war in the Midwest, the Dobbins brothers and a few of their associates chose to enlist in the Federal army upon reaching East Tennessee. Evidence does not suggest that Jesse, who returned home after the war and helped organize the Republican Party in Yadkin County,

23 Militiamen James West and John Williams were killed. Conscripts Eck Algood and Solomon Hinshaw were also killed. A report written forty-three years after the skirmish claims the militia fired first, killing Solomon Hinshaw “near the hearth with a bullet wound through his heart.” The report further states that the “conscripts were panic stricken, and they began to withdraw in disorder. Eck Algood being the first one to leave the house, was shot, and fell mortally wounded with five or six bullet holes through his body.” Additionally, conscripts Enoch Brown and Benjamin Willard were wounded. The writer claims that Captain “James West sank upon the stone door step a lifeless, and headless form, almost all of his head being shot off…John Williams…was seen to place his hand over his heart, and was heard to exclaim O! God, I am shot. He died in a few minutes.” From “Reminiscences of 43 Years Ago,” reprinted in Casstevens, The Civil War and Yadkin County, 151-53. Fourteen survivors fled toward Tennessee, according to William Dobbins, “they never ketchd nary one [of us] alive. Diary of William Dobbins. 1864, in Speer, ed., Voices from Cemetery Hill, 215. An arrest warrant listed the fourteen fugitives as Hugh Sprinkle, Jesse Dobbins, William Dobbins, Benjamin Willard, John Douglas, Jr., Anderson Douglas, Sanford Douglas, Lee Willard, William Willard, Horace Allgood, Thomas Adams, Enoch Brown, Robert Hutchens and James Wooten. Casstevens, Yadkin County and the Civil War, 141.

24 Jesse Dobbins [Strawberry Plaines, TN] to Sarah C. Dobbins [Yadkin County, N.C.], June 19, 1865, in Speer, Voices from Cemetery Hill, 209; Postwar diary of Jesse Dobbins [1865?], in Ibid., 212.
regretted his decision to bear arms. His brother, William, appears to have been equally at peace. Sadly, William did not survive the war. But in his last diary entry before his death, he “thank[ed] God that I can say that I do believe that the good Lord has pardoned my sins.”

Figure 12: Jesse Virgil Dobbins. Photograph courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, N.C., www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/exhibits/civilwar/explore_section4i.html.

The Quaker nexus, however, was not the only religious network that linked the upcountry to locations beyond Dixie. Moravians also had spiritual and community ties to the North and

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25 After the Civil War, most of the surviving party continued to live in Yadkin County. Jesse Dobbins “made himself a useful and respected citizen until his death many years after the war. James C. Wooten…is in very feeble health, and is now living in about one quarter of a mile of the Deep Creek battle ground…In a short time after the battle, Jackson Douglas [Douglas was one of the four captured within seven days] was shot and wounded in one arm, by the home guard, the wound causing his arm to forever dangle, a useless member, by his side until his death, which occurred several years after the close of the war.” Sanford and Anderson Douglas “are both living near Yadkinville. Horace Algood was successful in keeping himself secreted until peace was restored. He is now living in a pleasant and happy home near Yadkinville. Hugh Sprinkle fought [also caught within seven days and sent into Confederate service] until the end and is now living near Yadkinville…Benjamin Willard is now living out on R.F.D. route 3, Yadkinville.” Additionally, only two militiamen were known to be alive at the time the article was written: “R. M. Garbard [Gabard]…is living at Mt. Nebo Yadkin county, N.C. Henry Cowles, is and has been for years clerk of the federal court at Statesville, N.C. [in neighboring Iredell County]. “Reminiscences of 43 Years Ago,” in Casstevens, The Civil War and Yadkin County, 151-53.

Midwest. Unlike the mainline Evangelical institutions which divided along sectional lines over slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, the Moravian Church maintained its spiritual bond.\textsuperscript{27} The Moravian Church at the time of the Civil War consisted of a Northern and a Southern Province; however, the distinction was logistic, not political. The synods were in cooperation, maintaining “fraternal interest and regard” for one another.\textsuperscript{28} Southern delegates such as Robert De Schweinitz often traveled to Pennsylvania to attend meetings of the Northern Province.\textsuperscript{29}

Likewise, northern Moravians occasionally traveled south. Henry Rudolph Wullschlägel, for example, “came on a friendly visit to Wachovia” in July of 1858.\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, social ties bound Moravians together. Many “Salemites” had friends and relatives in Pennsylvania and it was not unusual for Wachovia residents to visit their relations in the North. In July 1858 a Salem diarist recorded that “Maria Schweinitz with her children returned from the north” as did “Caroline Siewers, who had been north on a long visit.”\textsuperscript{31} Moravian families occasionally sent teenage sons north, mostly temporary arrangements believed to be for their child’s own “good.” Frederic Bahnson and other young men traveled north for apprenticeships and work opportunities.\textsuperscript{32} School age boys such as Theodore Rights occasionally studied at Nazareth Hall

\textsuperscript{27} This is not to imply that antebellum disputes over the morality of slavery did not cause occasional rifts between the northern and southern branches of the Moravian Church; they did, but they were not enough to strain the relationship to the breaking point. Jon F. Sensbach, \textit{A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1764-1840} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 191-192.

\textsuperscript{28} Quoted from “Memorabilia of Salem Congregation,” 1858, in C. Daniel Crews and Lisa D. Bailey, eds., \textit{Records of the Moravians in North Carolina}, Vol. XII, 1856-1866, (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 200), 6262.

\textsuperscript{29} For instance, in 1858 the “Provincial Synod of the Southern Province. . . . appointed a delegate to the Northern Provincial Synod. Br. Robt. De Schweinitz, the brother elected, accordingly attended the sessions of that Synod, which met at Bethlehem on June 2d.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} “Salem Diary,” July 8, 1858, in Crews & Bailey, eds., \textit{Records of the Moravians in North Carolina}, 6267.

\textsuperscript{31} “Salem Diary,” July 27, 1858, in Ibid., 6267.

\textsuperscript{32} Sarah Bahnson Chapman, ed., \textit{Bright and Gloomy Days: The Civil War Correspondence of Captain Charles Frederic Bahnson, a Moravian Confederate} (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), xi-xii.
in the Moravian community of Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Wachovia girls were more apt to remain local for school. Yet, they would have had the opportunity to bond with their northern counterparts. Pennsylvania Moravians occasionally sent their daughters south to study at the renowned Salem Female Academy. 

Upcountry Moravians had social and religious ties to the Midwest as well. Like their Quaker neighbors, in the decades leading up to the Civil War a number of Wachovia residents left the South. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Moravian expatriates from the upcountry founded the settlements of New Salem, Illinois and Hope, Indiana. Like Quaker settlements, the communities were named in honor of Moravian villages in North Carolina. Both New Salem and Hope fell under the domain of the Southern Province until 1855 when the Northern Province assumed control. Still, the communities maintained close religious and social ties with Wachovia. Communication and travel between Moravian settlements in the upcountry and the Midwest were ongoing. In September 1858, “Margaret and Jane Miller and Benj. Chitty left here for Hope, Indiana, on a visit to their parents.” Likewise, in 1860 James Haman a Moravian minister in New Salem, Illinois traveled back to Salem to visit his mother. The Civil War did not disrupt the spiritual and social community that bound Moravians in North Carolina and the Midwest together. In September 1865, Reverend Jacob F. Siewers “received a call to go

33 On Sunday, August 7, 1859, Christian Lewis Rights wrote that we “left Salem for High Point with our son Theodore. He is going to Nazareth Hall. He is 13 years old today. It was hard to give him up, but hope it will be for his good.” “Friedberg Diary,” August 7, 1858, in Crews & Bailey, eds., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*, 6344.

34 Young Moravian women from Pennsylvania such as “Miss L” who penned “Returned from the South” in 1862 attended the female academy at Salem. See Chapman, *Bright and Gloomy Days*, xxxix.


37 “Salem Diary,” June 17, 1860, in Ibid., 6352.
to West Salem, Illinois.”38 The following month, the Reverend, his wife Matilda, and their
daughter Carolina relocated to Illinois.39

The Civil War made communication between Moravians in the various sections difficult, but it did not extinguish their sense of Christian community or cause cooperation to cease. At some point in 1862, Francis R. Holland of Salem recorded in the church record that “intelligence has been received that Br. Bishop and his family had arrived at Bethlehem, Pa., in a very destitute condition.”40 Interestingly, the following year, Holland himself “left with his family on a longer visit to Bethlehem, Penna.”41 While the nature of these particular visits is unknown, religious networks connecting Wachovia to Pennsylvania and the Midwest became political during the Civil War for Moravian conscripts such as Constantine Hege and Alexander Mock, neighbors in Davidson County and members of the same congregation at Friedberg Moravian Church. Nineteen year old Hege reluctantly reported for Confederate service in 1862. After fourteen months of active duty, Federal troops captured him at Bristoe Station. While in prison in Washington, D.C., Hege took the Oath of Allegiance to the United States and “at once proceeded to Bethlehem, Penn., where he met many warm friends, and at once sought employment. . . in the Bethlehem Iron works.”42 Following the end of the war, Hege returned to Wachovia where he married Frances Mary Spaugh and established a “small foundry” of his own in Salem that eventually became the Salem Iron works.43 During the war, another reluctant Confederate, Alexander Mock, served alongside of Hege in Company H of the Forty-Eighth

38 “Private Diary of R. P. Leinbach,” September 19, 1865, in Ibid., 6608.
39 “Salem Diary,” October 14, 1865, in Ibid., 6569. Matilda Amalia Winkler Siewers and presumably Caroline returned to Bethania after Jacob Siewers died in 1867. Ibid., 6288.
40 “Memorabilia of Salem Congregation,” 1862, in Ibid., 6442.
41 Memorabilia of Salem Congregation, 1863, in Ibid., 6471.
43 Ibid.
North Carolina Infantry. Conscripted in July 1862, they likely reported for duty together. After two years on the front in Virginia, Mock found an opportunity to flee to Hope, Indiana where he reunited with upcountry expatriates from the Wachovia community. An active Moravian back home in Friedberg, as a refugee Mock “attached himself as a member” to the congregation in Hope. Like Hege, Mock never intended to stay away from friends and family in North Carolina permanently. Following the Confederate surrender he hurried home to his wife, Louisa, albeit to unfortunate news. Sadly, his infant son, Alston, had died while he was in Indiana.44

Other Moravians used the overland network as well. In 1864 a Bethania diarist, Jacob Siewers, noted that “Reinhold Oehman, Egbert Lehman, and the Millers left last night.”45 Though the entry reveals little, Ebert Lehman’s memoir written after the turn of the twentieth century confirms that he and his compatriots were going to Indiana, presumably to stay with relatives, quite possibility in the settlement of Hope. Lehman reveals that “an unsuccessful effort in 1864 to cross the line” forced them to return home to Wachovia in “deep snow.” However, their next effort met with more success. After trekking for “several hundred miles across the mountains. . . . [they] reached the state of Indiana” where they “remained a year.”46 Though young men were the ones who had to make the arduous journey to avoid Confederate conscription, they did not work alone. Their success and survival relied on the social webs that their elders had spun over decades. After the war, William Lehman, Egbert’s father, reported that he “helped” the boys make it “thro the lines, into the Union side.47 While it does not appear

45 “Bethania Diary, with Bethabera,” 1864, in Ibid., 6536-37.
46 Ibid.
47 William Lehman, who turned fifty during the Civil War, was a prominent member of the Wachovia community who described himself as a “union man.” The 1860 census lists him as a mechanic. But in a deposition taken before the Southern Claims Commission in 1872 he stated that he was mostly farming during the war on the one hundred and twenty acres that he owned in Bethania. Eighth Census of the U.S.: 1860, Forsyth County, N.C., Population Schedule; William Lehman, Forsyth County, RG 233, M 1407, SCC.
that the patriarch slogged through the snow with his “son & nephew,” it is safe to assume that he coordinated their effort with Moravian associates local and abroad. Certainly Jacob Siewers, the church diarist for the Bethania congregation, was aware of the escape. Quite possibly Samuel Stoltz, a Wachovia Moravian who was then in his sixties, was part of their anti-Confederate network. During the war, the self-proclaimed Unionist “tried to persuade” young men in his neighborhood “to go through the lines to the United States.”

Stoltz did not elaborate on the route he encouraged them to take, but as a distinguished Wachovia elder he was undoubtedly associated with the extended community in Pennsylvania and the Midwest.

It is reasonable to speculate that the religious network forged by Moravians aided those outside of their immediate religious fold. Individuals such as Philip Mock, a Methodist living in the heart of Wachovia, would have been intimately acquainted with the Moravian population that surrounded him. Politically in step with Moravians in his immediate neighborhood, Mock opposed the Confederate cause. At some point after April 1862 he left the state in order to avoid conscription. Like his neighbors Reinhold Oehman and Egbert Lehman, Mock “went to Indiana and remained there until the close of the war.” Evidence suggests that he had acquaintances who assisted him on the backend. A blacksmith in North Carolina, he was able to make a living “working at his trade” in the Midwest. Granted, attaching a Moravian influence to Mock’s wartime experience is conjecture. Yet it is plausible. Southern Moravians, like

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48 Samuel Stoltz, Claim 15,085, Forsyth County, N.C., Feb. 22, 1878, (RG 217), SCC.
50 Claim of Phillip Mock, Claim 15,720, Forsyth County, N.C., 1876, RG 217, SCC.
Quakers in nearby counties, did not operate in a vacuum. They were members of their larger community, bound to their neighbors through blood and association.\textsuperscript{51} It is probable that Mock himself claimed Moravian kin.\textsuperscript{52} Moravians and their neighbors also worshiped together. In 1857, John Chapman Cooke of Friedland believed that “Nearly every family which was once ‘Moravian’ has now an admixture of Baptist or Methodist among some of its members” and it was not unusual for “parents (Moravians) and children (Methodists or Baptists) [to] troop off together to camp meetings or dippings.”\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps Philip Mock realized his religious calling at one of the “Methodist camp meetings” that were “in vogue” in the foothills in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{54} In September of 1853, Basil Armstrong Thomasson of nearby Yadkin County attended a four day camp meeting “at Mt. Tabor, in Forsyth.” While there, he noted in his diary that “Michael Doub baptizes Philip Mock by immersion, in Silas Creek.”\textsuperscript{55} That same year, Mock helped organize Brookstown United Methodist Church. Located in Pfafftown, a rural settlement on the outskirts of Bethania, it was the first Methodist church in the immediate neighborhood.\textsuperscript{56}

Interdenominational worship may have encouraged in some Moravians an “itching fancy to desert their own church,” but it strengthened the social community and expanded the influence

\textsuperscript{51} For insight into the acculturation process which took place in Wachovia over the course of one hundred years, see S. Scott Rohrer, \textit{Hope’s Promise}.

\textsuperscript{52} Though a blood line is not obvious, Philip’s surname suggests he shared kin ties with Moravian community. A number of Mocks were members of the Moravian Church. For instance, the families of Alexander B. Mock Sr., Alexander B. Mock, Jr., Andrew L. Mock, Edward G. Mock, John J. Mock, Lewis A. Mock, Nathaniel Mock, etc. See Crews & Bailey, eds., \textit{Records of the Moravians in North Carolina}.


\textsuperscript{54} Quoted from “Friedland Diary,” July 26, 1857, in Ibid., 6257.


that Moravianism had on the larger foothill region. As S. Scott Rohrer argues, cooperation with their non-Moravian neighbors made Wachovia Moravians progressively more “Southern.” But this was certainly not a one-way exchange. It also allowed other local Protestants to become more Moravian. Camp meetings, baptisms, religious festivals, and Lovefeasts brought Protestants from across Wachovia and portions of the surrounding foothills into a mutual religious community. Moravian ministers often visited rural areas on the outskirts of Wachovia. They occasionally traveled northwest toward the Blue Ridge, stretching their religious influence and social network to places such as Mount Airy and Pilot Mountain in Surry County. Often sharing pulpits with Methodist and Baptist clergy, they could draw quite a crowd. In July 1860, for instance, Brother Bahnson visited Davie County and preached “to a congregation so large that half of them could not have gotten in the house. . . . After preaching Br. Farabee, an Episcopal Methodist, closed by prayer.” Moravian R. P. Leinbach commented in April 1860 that women in his congregation had recently missed church because they had “all gone to the Baptist singing school.” Additionally, local children received a healthy dose of Moravianism from an early age. In 1858 a member of the Friedland congregation noted that

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57 Quoted from “Friedland Diary,” July 26, 1857, in Crews & Bailey, eds., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 6257. Despite this diarist’s fears, in general Moravian clergy encouraged interdenominationalism. They often participated in camp meetings and other religious services in cooperation with local Methodist and Baptist congregations. See Crews & Bailey, eds., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina.

58 Basil A. Thomasson refers to one of the festivals in his diary. On November 16, 1853, he wrote that “tomorrow & next day, are the great feast days at Old Town [the portion of Salem originally settled in the eighteenth century]. It is, I supposed, on hundred years since the United Brethren landed on the waters of Muddy Creek. One hundred years! That is a long, long time.” Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, November 16, 1853, in Escott, North Carolina Yeoman, 14. The church diarist reported that approximately nine hundred people attended a public Lovefeast held in Bethania in June 1859. “Bethania Reports, with Bethabera,” 1859, in Crews & Bailey, eds., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina, 6335-6336. Moravian Lovefeasts became so popular that the churches at times charged admission. For instance in November 1856, the Salem congregation decided to “admit by ticket upon personal application to the minister such individuals as are communicant members of other Christian denominations.”

59 For instance, see Ibid., 6248, 6250, 6251.6291, 6655, and 6658.

60 “[New] Philadelphia Reports, with Macedonia, Muddy Creek,” 1860, in Ibid., 6390.

61 “Private Diary of R. P. Leinbach,” April 22, 1860, in Ibid., 6387.
their “Sunday School is in fact composed of children whose parents belong either to the Baptists or Methodists ... as they have no Sunday Schools.”

The interdenominational spirit that tied upcountry Protestants together fostered anti-Confederate activism during the Civil War. For years upcountry Protestants had participated in an exchange of socioreligious ideals that were not consistent with some of the Southern Orthodoxy’s cornerstone doctrines. However, as the war progressed, their heritage of religious dissent and cooperation found an all new significance. Quakers, for the most part, had not wavered in their commitment to nonviolence. But the war caused some Moravians to renew their religious commitment to pacifism. Most Baptists and Methodists probably never labeled themselves as pacifists; however, ongoing death and destruction made their neighbors’ peace principles all the more appealing. In effect, war weariness drew out a pacifist spirit in portions of the upcountry where the Quaker and Moravian influence was the most substantial. By mid 1863 upcountry residents ranging from Primitive Baptist Azariah Denny to Moravians Solomon and Catherine Hege were praying incessantly for peace. Though they hoped that “God Almighty ... [would] soon interpose,” they did not stand idly by. Cooperating on the homefront, the most proactive launched a peaceful assault against the Devil of secession and his unpatriotic Legion of Confederates.

In the summer of 1863 anti-Confederates in North Carolina organized and petitioned for peace. In the three months following the Battle of Gettysburg, approximately one hundred peace meetings took place in counties across the state. Support for the peace movement was strongest, however, in the Piedmont and foothills where at least two-thirds, if not more, of the meetings

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62 “Friedland Reports,” 1858, in Ibid., 6299.
63 Quoted from Solomon Hege [Davidson County, N.C.] to C. A. Hege, June 11, 1863, Constantine Alexander Hege Papers, SHC.
were held. As historian William T. Auman observes, this was a region of yeomen, many of which were unenthusiastic about slavery. Rightfully so, but the region was also religiously diverse and tight-knit. It was a place where the Southern Orthodoxy had failed to convert the masses, and where a spectrum of folk Protestants and others pushed forward together in their daily, as well as spiritual, lives. Also important, it was a region where religious pacifism was part of the landscape. By no means was it practiced by all Protestants; still, the spirit of nonviolence blew in the wind and upcountry residents could recognize it as a legitimate religious choice. This unique blend of social and religious factors which made the region distinctive created an environment ripe for collective political activism. Starting in the summer of 1863, the most decisive and resounding calls for peace and reunion came out of the upcountry. The proceedings of a few select meetings in the Piedmont and foothills characterize the religious impulse and interdenominational spirit that gave strength and distinctiveness to the peace movement in that portion of the state.

A meeting held in Chatham County on Saturday, August 22, 1863 perhaps best illuminates the breadth, flexibility and interconnectedness of upcountry Protestantism. The assembly, reportedly consisting of “a large portion of the citizens from this and other sections” gathered at Pleasant Hill, a Methodist church in the rural community of Sandy Grove. Opening the meeting with “a very able prayer” was Reverend Enoch Crutchfield, a birthright Quaker who

64 The North Carolina Standard published the proceedings of peace meetings from across the state. Combing through the Standard from August 1863 indicates that the peace movement was particularly strong in counties where the Quaker and Moravian influence was high such as Chatham, Guilford, Randolph, Forsyth, Yadkin, and Surry Counties.


had dedicated himself to the Baptist faith at the age of eighteen. Following his commencement
prayer, those in attendance appointed Crutchfield and two others including a Reverend S.
McPherson to draft resolutions for publication in the North Carolina Standard. Though
McPherson’s identity is difficult to decipher, it is probable that he had immediate ties to the local
Quaker and Wesleyan Methodist communities, perhaps he was a member of one of these
denominations himself. For years a McPherson family had been active in Cane Creek Friends
Meeting only a few miles away in Alamance County. Likewise, McPhersons in the same
vicinity had embraced Wesleyan Methodism in the 1840s, and had become outspoken opponents
of slavery and secession. Regardless, the location of the assembly and the leadership selected
illuminate the meeting’s religious mooring and unique interdenominalonal nature. Only in

69 The McPherson surname is found throughout Quaker North Carolina, but is particularly prevalent at Cane Creek Friends Meeting in Alamance County. Hinshaw, ed., Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol., I, North Carolina Yearly Meeting. Additionally, a number of McPhersons are buried at Cane Creek Friends Meeting just over the county line in Alamance County. Alamance County, North Carolina Cemeteries, Cane Creek Friends Meeting Cemetery, Cemetery Census Online, http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/alam/cem043.htm (accessed December 15, 2012).
70 Perhaps most notable was Micajah McPherson whose family lived near the Cane Creek Quaker Meeting. Just one year before the peace meeting at Pleasant Hill, an overzealous Confederate patrol lynched Micajah for his complicity in helping his son, Thomas—then thirty years old, married, and a father of two—evade the Confederate draft. Miraculously Micajah survived and lived into the 1890s. Lee Haines, “Micajah McPherson: A Layman with Convictions,” The Wesleyan Church, media.wesleyan.org/Micajah%20MCPherson-en.pdf. Additionally, in 1860 the Micajah McPherson family lived in close proximity to members of the Way family. More than likely they were related to F. Way and B. Way, Sr. who helped conduct the peace meeting at Pleasant Hill. Eighth Census of the U.S., 1860: Chatham County, N.C., Population Schedule; “Public Meeting in Chatham County,” North Carolina Standard, Wednesday, September 9, 1863.
particular portions of the upcountry would a birthright Quaker/born-again Baptist host a meeting in a Methodist Episcopal church aided by a potential abolitionist Wesleyan Methodist. A pacifist slant can also be inferred. Most likely Quaker pacifism continued to influence Reverend Crutchfield well after his Baptist rebirth. As a birthright Quaker he was a beneficiary of pacifist principles, and he likely maintained his social connection to the religious community in which he was raised. It is also not a stretch to assume that familiarity with Quaker principles influenced those who attended the meeting as well. Active Quakers probably participated in the assembly. However, pacifism would not have been alien to non-Quakers around Sandy Grove, individuals who were intimately associated with their neighbors and respective of their socioreligious principles.

Protestant cooperation and a respect for religious pacifism also characterized peace rallies held in Forsyth, Guilford, Randolph, and Yadkin counties that same month. The Moravian-operated Salem Press reported that a meeting near Wachovia drew an estimated crowd of up to fifteen hundred participants from Forsyth and surrounding counties. One attendee claimed it “was the largest and most harmonious body of people I have seen collected since the commencement of the war.” Other meetings in the region drew “large and respectable” crowds as well. In western Guilford County near Sandy Ridge, a committee comprised of Quakers and other Protestants, including at least one Primitive Baptist, pledged together that they were “thankful to Almighty God for the many privileges and blessings” they had enjoyed in the

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71 In addition to those discussed, see “Public Meeting in Randolph County,” North Carolina Standard, August 23, 1863; and “Public Meeting in Yadkin County,” North Carolina Standard, August 23, 1863.
72 The meeting convened at the Forsyth County Courthouse in Winston on Wednesday, August 26, 1864. The Standard later “learn[ed] that between 1,200 and 1,500 of the citizens of Forsyth, Stokes, Davidson, Randolph, Rockingham, Yadkin, and Surry were in attendance.” “The Meeting in Forsyth,” North Carolina Standard, September 2, 1864.
73 Ibid.
74 Quoted from “Public Meeting in Guilford County” [held at “Stanley’s store”]. North Carolina Standard, August 27, 1863.
old Union, and resolved that the war must “immediately cease.”

Together they also expressed regret that the war had forced “poor unprepared mortals” into their graves, and “degraded us in the estimation of all Christian people the world over.” A coalition of Lutherans, German Reformed, and likely others, asserted similar sentiments at another public meeting in Guilford County. On August 27, a committee including Abraham Clapp and Levi Barnhart, both active members of the Reformed “Brick Church,” made an interdenominational plea for all “who are in favor of peace to meet and hold public prayer meetings, and pray to God to bring this unholy war to a close. . . . And if God be for us who can be against us.”

Although peace meetings took place across North Carolina, the most urgent, and at times most controversial, calls for peace came out of the upcountry. The primary rallying cry shouted by peace advocates in 1863 was for an “honorable peace,” an ambiguous appeal which oftentimes lacked clear meaning. Peace advocates in the foothills, however, were more decisive in their demands. Meetings such as the one in Sandy Ridge recalled the nation’s previous blessings and urged an immediate ceasefire. However, resolutions drafted by anti-Confederates in Surry County were perhaps the most pointed. Assembling at “Whitfield Muster ground” on July 30 the committee resolved that “the best thing the people of North Carolina could do would

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75 Heading the meeting were birthright Quakers George Bowman, Romulus Wilburn (Welborn), and Nathan Beard. Hinshaw, ed., Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol., I. The other leaders, Marion Crede, James Leach, and Caleb Idle (Idol), do not appear to have been Quakers. Caleb Idle is buried in the cemetery of Saints Delight Primitive Baptist Church in Forsyth County. It appears that he was a Primitive Baptist in 1863. Unconfirmed genealogical records suggest that Caleb’s wife, Sally Bodenhamer, came from a line of Primitive Baptists who attended Abbotts Creek Primitive Baptist Church in nearby Rowan County, North Carolina Yearly Meeting. Forsyth County, North Carolina Cemeteries, Saints Delight Primitive Baptist Cemetery, Find a Grave, http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=72706201. Faye Jarvis Moran, “Bodenhamer Family,” The Jarvis Family & Other Relatives (last updated Nov. 3, 2007), http://www.fmoran.com/bodenhamer.html.

76 “Public Meeting in Guilford County,” North Carolina Standard, August 26, 1863.

77 “Public Meeting in Guilford County” [held at “Alamance school house” on August 29, 1863], North Carolina Standard, Wednesday, September 9, 1863. Among those selected to draft resolutions were Levi Barnhart and Abraham Clapp, W. P. Montgomery, and George Starr, all of which were German Protestants of either the Lutheran or German Reformed tradition. Rev. David Isaiah Offman, trans., Brick Church Records (N.C.: Brick Church, 1959). William S. Gilmer and J. Causley were also on the committee, but their denominational affiliations are unclear.
be to go in for the ‘Constitution as it is, and the Union as it was.’” The proceedings of the meeting, which were published in the *North Carolina Standard*, angered some. In the eastern Sandhills, the pro-Confederate *Fayetteville Observer* condemned the “treasonable resolution that disgraced the action of the meeting in Surry County” and noted that “no meeting but this one in Surry has hinted at such disgraceful terms” for peace. The *Observer* furthermore asserted that the Surry resolutions would encourage disloyalty and “will do more for the Yankees than any army that they have can effect.”

Surry County’s anti-Confederate zeal can be attributed to a culmination of social and religious factors. Located in the northernmost stretch of the Yadkin Valley, Surry County was largely comprised of nonslaveholding yeomen families who vehemently opposed secession prior to April 15, 1861. Local whites turned to support the Confederacy after Lincoln’s call for troops, but reverted to Unionism with a vengeance as the war progressed. Policies such as conscription, which left families suffering on the homefront, zapped every ounce of enthusiasm the local “poor” could muster for Jefferson Davis and the Confederate cause. Lukewarm about secession to begin with, rekindling their Unionism seemed natural. Importantly, however, Surry County was also a place where the Southern Orthodoxy had little hold, and where an array of Protestant cultures regularly mingled. Even though Moravians did not construct a church in Surry until after the Civil War, interaction with Moravians, just over the county border in

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80 Approximately 1/9 of Surry County’s population was enslaved in 1860. Surry County had fifteen planters in 1860 who held twenty or more slaves. Hugh Gwyn of Mount Airy held forty-six, far more than most planters in the county. Hugh Galloway of Mount Airy was next in line, holding thirty-seven people in bondage. All other planters ranged from between twenty and thirty slaves. It is interesting to note that Siamese twins Eng and Chang Bunker held eighteen slaves in 1860. Eighth Census of the U.S., 1860: Surry County, N.C., Slave Schedule. In February 1861 North Carolina held a vote to gauge the amount of interest in holding a secession convention. In Surry County 1136 voted against holding a convention; 207 voted in favor of holding a convention. “Official Vote of Surry, Feb. 21, 1861,” *North Carolina Standard*, March 20, 1861. Surry County was not alone; most upcountry voters primarily voted “no convention.” Marc W. Krum, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 276-278.
Quakerism also had a strong influence. Some of the county’s Friends lived around the settlement of Westfield, named years earlier for the Westfield Monthly Meeting. Perhaps even more lived along the Yadkin River on the county’s southern border, a region that was one of the most active Quaker districts in the foothills, and a noted hotspot of anti-Confederate sentiment. In addition, folk Protestantism thrived in Surry County. It was a particular stronghold for hard-shell Primitive Baptists. Surry County formed the nucleus of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association which claimed membership across the county and beyond. All in all, the distinctive religious atmosphere in Surry County and the surrounding foothills helped make political dissent all the more feasible.

The same cooperative spirit that propelled the peace movement also drove other anti-Confederate initiatives in the region. Arguably the most intriguing was the Heroes of America, also known as the Red Strings. As Reuben Tilley, a former member, explained after the war, the Heroes of America was “a secret organization of Union men during the war, who were opposed to the rebellion, and the object was to assist each other in their Union principles.” Tilley and others such as his Stokes County neighbor Edward Mabe, Jr. contributed to a region-wide network of anti-Confederates who declared themselves “opposed to the rebellion.”

Still somewhat shrouded in mystery, evidence suggests that the Heroes of America originated in the war’s first year around Wachovia or perhaps one of the nearby Quaker counties such as Guilford or Randolph. While the organization likely had Moravian or Quaker roots, it

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81 As noted previously, Moravian ministers regularly traveled through Surry County, often staying overnight with local acquaintances. Additionally, camp meeting and other religious events drew residents from across the foothill region together. Also, Salem was a center of commerce and a destination market town for farmers and others in the foothill region, including Basil A. Thomasson who described it as “a thriving town, and a nice place.” Diary of Basil A. Thomasson, December 21, 1864, in Escott, ed., North Carolina Yeoman, 57. For numerous instances of economic, social, and religious interactions between Yadkin Valley residents and Wachovia Moravians, see Crews & Bailey, eds., Records of the Moravians in North Carolina.

82 This is the vicinity of Deep Creek Friends Meeting and the Bond Schoolhouse.

83 Claim of Reuben Tilley, Claim 5,945, Stokes County, N.C., 1878, RG 217, SCC.
eventually spread beyond the Piedmont into the foothills and mountains of northwestern North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia, the very heart of the folk Protestant South. Red Strings chapters appear to have been organized on the community level by local men. Mathias Masten who lived in Forsyth County just east of Wachovia “helped to organize this band of 600 Union men about the middle of the war.”

Henderson Morefield in neighboring Stokes County insisted that the organization was “well known in the country” by late 1863. Though Red Strings chapters were grassroots efforts, they were in conversation with a larger membership. E. B. Pietre, was in correspondence with Heroes near Wytheville, Virginia, approximately one hundred and twenty miles northwest of his home in Bethania. “The order,” according to Pietre, “was extensive in that country,” at least by 1864.

The “country” to which Pietre referred was the New River Valley of southwestern Virginia, a region characterized by religious dissent. Like the Wachovia vicinity and other parts of the North Carolina Piedmont, the New River Valley of Virginia was a religiously diverse section where the Southern Orthodoxy had failed to make significant inroads in the decades before the Civil War. Here, in the hills of south-central Appalachia, folk Protestantism flourished. The troubled Holston Conference extended into the New River Valley. Some of the Valley’s Methodists had even embraced antislavery Wesleyanism in the 1850s. Primitive Baptist churches dotted the landscape as well. Despite Primitive Baptists’ religious injunction against joining secret organizations, some including members of the Fisher River Association “joined a secret order called ‘Red Strings.’”

In the New River Valley, folk Protestants and

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84 Claim of the Estate of Darius Masten, Claim 14,839, Forsyth County, N.C., 1873, RG 233, SCC.
85 Claim of Reuben Tilley, Claim 5,945, Stokes County, N.C., 1878, RG 217, SCC.
87 After the war, elders in the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association debated the standing of church members who had joined the Heroes of America. It would not have been unusual for elders to discuss the standing of an individual who went against church policy and joined a secret society. However, the issue nearly split the association in the years between 1869 and 1871. One must wonder to what extent wartime politics divided the
pacifists mingled. Sizeable Dunkard populations lived in counties such as Wythe and Floyd. Despite their Anabaptist inclination to retreat from the world, at least a few German Brethren, such as Eli Epperly, joined the Heroes of America. Like other activists in his New River Valley community, Epperly wanted to help likeminded Unionists “brake the Confederacy down.”

Joshua Weddle, another local Dunkard, risked his own life to feed “poor fellows who had to stay in the woods.” Weddle, however, did not view the men he aided as cowards or shirkers. Rather he saw them as “advocates of the Union cause.”

Religiously centered, yet interdenominational in nature, Dunkards, Primitive Baptists, and others inducted into the Heroes of America bound themselves together as “Brother Hero[es].” “In the presence of Almighty God,” they committed themselves to the Union and one another, a pledge they sealed by “Kiss[ing] the Bible.”

Viewing their activism through a religious lens, the Heroes utilized Scriptural symbolism that transcended church boundaries. Of particular importance was the Old Testament book of Joshua which served as their guidebook of elders and the congregation. Unfortunately little can be inferred from the church records. The postwar minutes of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association state: “About the close of the Civil War some members of the church had joined a secret order called ‘Red Strings,’ a party of which the writer knows nothing, it being ‘secret.’ Some of the members protested against it. The matter had been before the association at a previous session, and the association as a body declared, ‘We hold no fellowship with any secret organization,’ and advised the churches composing the body to deal with members belonging to secret orders as transgressors; and at this meeting a request was made that the churches report whether any persons belonging to such orders were held in fellowship.” Jesse A. Ashburn, History of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association, 1832-1904 (Laurel Fork, Va.: F. P. Branscome, 1905), 57-58.

88 Ely Epperly quoted in Paul R. Dotson, Jr., “‘Sisson’s Kingdom’: Loyalty Divisions in Floyd County, Virginia, 1861-1865” (MA Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997) , 67
89 Joshua Weddle quoted in Ibid., 40.
90 For instance, Methodist Ransom Phipps and Primitive Baptist Caleb Idol were close associates from the same Forsyth County neighborhood. Eighth Census of the U.S., 1860: Forsyth County, N.C., Population Schedule; Claim of Reuben Tilley, Claim 5,945, Stokes County, N.C., 1878, RG 217, SCC. More than likely they were associated with E. B. Petrie, a Bethania blacksmith who was also a member of the Heroes of America. Interestingly, Petrie insisted that there were a series of secret symbols that members used to identify one another. Relying on code, however, became increasingly tenuous. In 1864, Petrie incriminated himself by passing a Heroes sign to an undercover Confederate agent on a train in southwestern Virginia. Soon after, the agent detained Petrie and sent him to be incarcerated at Castle Thunder in Richmond. “Report of Detectives,” in OR, 816.
sorts. Heroes likened themselves to Rahab who, in the book’s second chapter, concealed Israelites who were being rooted out by the king of Jericho. Just as Rahab told the fugitives to “Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you,” the Heroes of America dedicated themselves to concealing and feeding Confederate deserters and conscripts on the homefront. Additionally, because Rabab tied a “scarlet cord” to her window after helping the Israelites flee, members of the organization occasionally affixed red strings to their doors and lapels as a secret show of their Unionism and solidarity. Of course, likening anti-Confederates to the Israelites of old was intentionally metaphoric. As anti-Confederate Protestants adamantly decreed, the United States was God’s chosen nation, in effect, his modern-day Israel.

In closing, the mystery surrounding the Heroes of America leaves room to speculate that it may not have been a strictly fraternal organization. No doubt, it is the “brother” Heroes who stand out the most in existing records. But less conspicuous evidence suggests that the male membership did not operate alone. In 1864, Confederate detectives working to infiltrate the organization reported that women in the New River Valley were as ardent Unionists, and just as politically active, as the men. While traveling through Pulaski County, the agents found that the women “seemed to know all about the order,” and they discovered that at least “one of the women knew the passwords.” After leaving their encounter, the detectives “heard they were members of the order,” a revelation that appears to have been of little surprise. Whether this was commonplace or an isolated exception is unclear. The initiation rites which used the rhetoric of brotherhood suggest that the organization was, to an extent at least, male-focused.

Yet, the centrality of the Biblical heroine Rahab to the Heroes of America’s aims and ceremony may have been more than religiously significant. Quite possibly it alluded to the Heroes’

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94 Ibid.
activities as being gender inclusive as well. With fathers, brothers, and husbands “in the bushes,” the brunt of everyday anti-Confederate activism fell upon the shoulders of women.\footnote{For detailed analyses of anti-Confederate women on the upcountry homefront, see Victoria Bynum, \textit{Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Christopher A. Graham, “Women's Revolt in Rowan County,” \textit{Columbiad: A Quarterly Review of the War Between the States} 3 (Spring 1999): 131–147; Ralph Mann, “Guerrilla Warfare and Gender Roles: Sandy Basin, Virginia as a Test Case,” \textit{Journal of Appalachian Studies Association} 5 (1993): 59-66; and Gordon B. McKinney, “Women’s Role in Civil War Western North Carolina,” \textit{North Carolina Historical Review} 69 (January 1992): 37-56.} Thus, it is not a stretch to imagine that the many upcountry women who harbored and fed deserters on the homefront, a political choice they made of their own volition, did so in cooperation with a broader network. All in all, women probably did not become \textit{official} members of the Heroes of America (i.e., inducted via ceremony), yet it is extremely likely that they assumed a type of auxiliary membership, an informal association that community men would have recognized.

During the Civil War, participation in anti-Confederate initiatives such as the Heroes of America and the peace movement offered new opportunities for upcountry Protestants to work together toward a common goal. While the aims of these initiatives were purely political, they were built upon religious foundations that emphasized duty to both God and country. This plea held widespread appeal to war weary white Southerners ranging from Dunkards to Holston Methodists who had been reared in traditions of Scriptural and civil Protestantism. Once the tide of disaffection began to form, religious urgency helped upcountry residents reclaim their Unionism. Eventually, the Protestant undertones of their political dissent helped give cohesiveness and shape to their activism.

Religion influenced regional dissent in other ways as well. In 1863 and 1864, the most organized and pronounced calls for peace and reunion came from the North Carolina upcountry, most particularly areas where pacifists and class-conscious folk Protestants regularly interacted.
Of course, social and religious interdenominationalism was hardly just a wartime phenomenon. For decades the upcountry had been a place where Quakers swapped work with Methodists, where Moravians mingled with Primitive Baptists, and where they all occasionally worshiped together. The Civil War, however, transformed their associations, as neighbors became co-activists laboring against a Confederacy that they collectively realized, eventually at least, was unholy and corrupt. Interregional and intraregional religious networks, decades in the making, made their anti-Confederate activism all the more possible. Over the course of the war they became highways of political dissent, facilitating the movement of people and ideas within the upcountry and beyond to places such as Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Richmond, Indiana.

Importantly, emphasizing Christian commitment allowed anti-Confederates to make sense of their political activism without requiring them to surrender their Southern identity. Though they vehemently opposed the Confederate war and the “despots” who directed it, most probably did not hope to forsake the land of their birth, despite its flaws. As the Dobbins brothers implied, Unionists in their district were simply “Yadkin fellas,” likeminded “County boys” who banded together to protect God-bestowed “Libertys . . . more precious than gold.”96 At the same time, the use of Biblical imagery also helped anti-Confederates reconcile their “Southern-ness” with their rejection of the Confederacy. As the rhetoric of peace resolutions reveals, it enabled them to publically declare themselves as the downtrodden righteous, and their foes as ungodly and wicked oppressors. Scriptural metaphors also gave meaning to the Heroes of America who, like Rahab, risked their own lives to conceal and feed the hunted citizens of God’s once blessed nation. Perhaps most important, however, the cross-denominational appeals

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96 Quoted from, M.F. Farington [Westfield, Indiana] to Jesse Dobbins, August 28, 1864, in Jesse and William Dobbins Papers, FHC; Postwar diary of Jesse Dobbins [1865?], in Speer, ed., Voices from Cemetery Hill, 212; and Jesse Dobbins [Strawberry Plaines, TN] to Sarah C. Dobbins [Yadkin County, N.C.], June 19, 1865, in Ibid., 209.
and Christian symbolism that underpinned anti-Confederate activism implored the Almighty to recognize that devoted holdouts existed in the midst of the modern-day Gomorrah.
CONCLUSION:

“‘BABYLON IS FALLEN, IS FALLEN,’ AND THANK GOD FOR IT”

Human folly had led the nation into an unholy civil war, but God “interposed” in the spring of 1865, causing anti-Confederates to rejoice. Following the Confederate surrender, William Woods Holden, the editor of the notoriously disloyal *North Carolina Standard*, and the celebrated voice of anti-Confederate dissent, exulted that “‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen,’ and thank God for it.”¹Likening the news of the Union victory to the chant of “the angels above the plains of Bethlehem when they announced the birth of the Redeemer,” he exclaimed, “‘Glory to God in the highest.”²Holden largely attributed the Confederate defeat to “the Conservative people of the South” whose Christian-like devotion to the Union and peace had hastened the end of the war.³Now that “we are once more free,” Holden proclaimed, “let us ‘rally to the flag,’” a duty he insisted was both patriotic and religious.⁴Rally they did. Recognizing that “we owe a debt of gratitude to W. W. Holden,” the following month an assembly in the Yadkin Valley hailed “with joy, a speedy return to the ample folds of that national emblem which for more than

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³ Anti-Confederates in North Carolina often referred to themselves as “Conservatives,” and their opponents as “Destructives.”

a century has secured us in all our rights.”\textsuperscript{5} Not surprisingly, the committee selected to draft resolutions—which drew from the Primitive Baptist, Quaker, Methodist, and Moravian communities at least—represented a cross-section of the upcountry’s religious landscape.\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figures/13_14.jpg}
\caption{John Jones (left) and Vestal Hutchens (right) helped draft a series of pro-Union resolutions in Surry County, North Carolina on June 6, 1865. Both were noted community leaders. Jones served as the moderator of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association from 1848 until his death in 1875. Hutchens helped organize the Westfield Friends Meeting in Surry County after the Civil War. Photographs from Jesse A. Ashburn, \textit{History of the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association, 1832-1904} (Laurel Fork, VA: F.P. Branscome, 1905), title page; and Hester Bartlett Jackson, ed., \textit{Heritage of Surry County, North Carolina}, Vol. I (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Hunter Publishing Company, 1983), 299.}
\end{figure}

In the months and years following the Civil War, upcountry anti-Confederates, like all Americans, struggled with mixed success to make sense of the bloodshed that had befallen the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{5} Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, William L. Scott Papers, RL.

\textsuperscript{6} For example, Primitive Baptist Elder John Jones of the Fisher River Baptist Association acted as chair of the committee. Committee members Job Worth and Vestal Hutchens were Quakers who probably attended Deep Creek Meeting. Thomas Prather and Robert S. Gilmer were Methodists. Thomas Schaub was born into a Moravian family in Bethania. At some point in time he may have converted to Methodism, as he and his wife, Elizabeth Shamel (also a Wachovia surname), are buried in the “Old Methodist Cemetery” in Mount Airy, North Carolina. Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, William L. Scott Papers, RL; Faye Jarvis Moran, “Schaub Family,” \textit{The Jarvis Family & Other Relatives} (last updated June 24, 2005), http://www.fmoran.com/schaub.html; Surry County North Carolina Cemeteries, Index for Old Methodist Cemetery, \textit{Cemetery Census Online}, http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/surr/cem199.htm.
\end{footnotesize}
nation for four years. The optimism that Holden and others radiated in the spring and summer of 1865 turned to depression for some as farms already on the edge of ruin faced “wet in the spring” and “drought in the summer” which brought only small yields of corn. A “raging” epidemic of hog cholera further devastated the region in 1867.\(^7\) Perhaps worst of all, dormant households served as an ongoing reminder of war and death. Such was the case for Elizabeth Speer whose son Asbury was killed while in Confederate service. Despite her Unionist politics and longstanding aversion to slavery, the Civil War and its aftermath forced this Yadkin Valley Methodist, as a white Southerner, to grapple with her own faith and fate. Two years after the conclusion of the war, Speer lamented to her brother:

> The nation is so sad. . . . We have rebelled against our Maker and against our Government, and we could not expect nothing but judgment from the Almighty. . . . I wish I was away from this rebel state. I never wanted to leave the old South until they seceded from the old United States. If I was not so old I would try my best to persuade the rest of the family to move. But it looks like folly to break up now. We are so old and settled and have everything around us to render us comfortable, for we can't have many years to spend.\(^8\)

As her testimony alludes, identity and spiritual dilemmas could arise out of the paradox of being a white Southern Unionist. For Speer, Old Testament-like plagues left little doubt that the Divine was unleashing his wrath on the South. Still, despite her abounding melancholy and tainted perception of the land of her birth, Speer was thankful that she and her husband Aquilla “are spared and have as much as we do.”\(^9\) Whether or not she correlated being “spared” with her wartime Unionism is unclear. She simply noted that “it is better than we deserve.”\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Elizabeth Speer [Yadkin County] to A. Jackson Ashby, August 1867, in Speer, *Voices from Cemetery Hill*, 151.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Disunionists in league with the Devil may have brought the “unhallowed war,” but reunion was purely Providential.11 Probably most anti-Confederates, including Elizabeth Speer, agreed with William W. Holden, who, in 1866, proclaimed “to the people of North Carolina” that the Confederacy was “conquered in battle, because God willed it.”12 The Almighty, in effect, had condemned the Confederacy for attempting to tear asunder the nation he expressly granted to the generation of ’76 and bequeathed to their sacred progeny. The plea resounded. In the hills of East Tennessee, Daniel Ellis thanked “kind Providence” for ending the “reign of terror” in the South, and likened the Union victory to “the Archangel Michael slaying that old serpent, which is the devil.”13 Importantly, the Confederate defeat reaffirmed to dissenters that, despite their trials and tribulations, they had chosen the righteous course. Elizabeth Speer may have expected to live out her days surrounded by misery and woe, but, like other anti-Confederates in the midst of crisis and uncertainty, she forged ahead through this “Hellish world” and awaited her reward in the kingdom to come.14 So too did Daniel Ellis. He had no doubt that Secessionists would face “retributive justice” for their “damning crime[s].” But as for

11 Quoted from A. M. Johnson [“Camp 21st NC Reg.” from Surry County] to Gov. Vance, January 30, 1865, Zebulon Baird Vance Private Collection. NCDAH.
14 Quoted from Barton Pierce Smith [“Camp near Hanover Junction”] to “My Dear Brothers”[Carroll County, VA], June 17, 1863. Smith Family Letters, NL. The Smiths were residents of nearby Carroll County, Virginia. Reluctantly in Confederate service, in June 1863, Barton Smith informed his brother that, “I would now prefer death if I could but get to go home and stay with my family and people a while, and be buried in our church yard than to stay here any longer. What a happy exchange to pass from this Hellish world, to a world of infinite and eternal bliss. Who wouldn’t be willing to make the exchange?” Ironically, Confederate Home Guard murdered Smith three months later while he was home on furlough. See Barton Pierce Smith [“Camp near Hanover Junction”] to “My Dear Brothers”[Carroll County, VA], June 17, 1863, in Ibid.
him, Ellis looked forward to “the pathway to Heaven, wherein all may walk ... who ... shun the broad road that leads to hell!”  

The Confederate defeat also made clear that Providence willed the abolition of slavery. Even before the war, some white Southerners sensed that a war for emancipation loomed on the horizon. Dunkard Elder John Kline referred to God’s warning to the Israelites, found in the Old Testament book of Numbers, that “‘your sin will find you out.’” Writing in his journal in January of 1861 he insisted that, when war erupts, it will be because “the sin of holding three millions of human beings under the galling yoke of involuntary servitude has, like the bondage of Israel in Egypt, sent a cry to heaven for vengeance.” Most white Southerners probably did not possess Kline’s foresight, but his religious explanation for emancipation gained wider appeal in the South after the demise of slavery was “an accomplished fact.” In a June 1865 address to “the colored people of the State,” William Holden recognized that “Providence has willed ... releasing you from bondage.” Other anti-Confederates agreed, including Alexander H. Jones, an antislavery Unionist from the Asheville vicinity who, before the war, published a newspaper that opponents charged was “a d—d abolition sheet.” In 1865 Jones celebrated that the “decree is passed,” and assumed that emancipation was “one of the great events in God’s providence.”

15 Ellis, The Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis, 17, 293, 350.
17 Quoted from Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, William L. Scott Papers, RL. Struggling to explain defeat, even Confederates reticently agreed that God must have willed emancipation. Yet they doubted it was because slavery was inherently sinful. Rather, it was likely because some slaveholders had abused the privilege and lost site of the Christianizing mission that God intended slavery to be. For more on how Confederates rationalized and moved forward from military defeat, see Daniel W. Stowell, Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South (New York: Oxford university Press, 1998); and Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920, second edition (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009).
19 Alexander Hamilton Jones, Knocking at the Door: Knocking at the Door. Alex. H. Jones, Member-Elect to Congress: His Course Before the War, During the War, and After the War. Adventures and Escapes. (Washington, D.C.: McGill & Witherow, 1866), 3. Jones volunteered to fight for the Union in 1863. It appears that the “d—d
Still, highlighting a connection between opposition to the Confederacy and antislavery principles is a slippery slope. Namely, it runs the risk of implying that Southerners who welcomed the abolition of slavery were social progressives. Certainly some such as Eli W. Caruthers were well ahead of their time. Caruthers, of course, did not exist in a vacuum; his advocacy for total racial equality in “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders” is enough to suggest that other whites harbored similar sentiments, even if their voices are lost in time. Nevertheless, the surviving record suggests that most upcountry whites, including anti-Confederates who admittedly opposed slavery, were hardly prepared to look upon their black neighbors as equals. William L. Brown, an East Tennessee Baptist who volunteered to serve in a Federal cavalry unit, supported emancipation. Yet he wanted blacks removed from the South, or at least ousted from his community on the outskirts of Knoxville. “If they ain’t sent away,” he declared in an 1864 letter home, “I will fight them as long as I live.” That same year, Asbury Speer, who was raised in an antislavery household, opined to his parents, Elizabeth and Aquilla, that slavery was “some national sin hanging over us.” Speer was also “in favor of” emancipation, but like Brown, he insisted that he “would be glad if every drop of nigger blood was out of the Confederacy.” Even more generous appeals were fundamentally racist and paternalistic, often exuding the same social and economic anxiety that undergirded Brown’s and Speer’s overtly antagonistic statements. William Holden, for instance, avowed in June of 1865

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20 Jones, Knocking at the Door, 36.
21 Eli Washington Caruthers was the Presbyterian minister discussed in Chapter two whose unpublished manuscript entitled “American Slavery and the Immediate Duty of Southern Slaveholders” insisted, among other things, that blacks and whites are innately equal.
22 William Laban Brown [Camp near Nashville] to “Dear Father and Mother” [Knox County, TN], June 1, 1864. William Brown Letters, AOA.
23 Asbury Speer to Aquilla Speer, Feb. 18, 1864, in Speer, Voices from Cemetery Hill, 121-122.
that he and “all the good people” hoped the best for those emerging from slavery. Yet he made clear that, for the time being at least, blacks must defer to the “superior intelligence of the white race,” or “ultimate extinction” would be imminent. Schooled in the same social theory which defined blacks as inherently degraded, irreligious, and “idle,” at the end of the day, it can only be surmised that most upcountry whites, probably Unionists and antislavery folks to boot, were as ardent racists as Cotton Kingdom Confederates. The upcountry was certainly distinctive, but not out of touch with the prejudices of nineteenth century America.

Ultimately, upcountry dissenters strove to “do right,” but as humans, and products of their time and place, they were hardly saints. Their inability to progress beyond the racial barriers of their time, however, does not diminish the importance of the antislavery spirit that marked the region prior to the Civil War, a spirit that was part and parcel of the upcountry’s particular religious dynamic. A heritage of interdenominational cooperation facilitated a locally unique socioreligious exchange between a variety of Protestants—Quakers, Moravians, folk Protestants, and others—which allowed antislavery thought to proliferate, even during the tumultuous decades following Nat Turner’s Rebellion. Importantly, opposition to slavery remained a cornerstone of upcountry religion, even as the Southern Evangelical establishment turned to embrace slavery and slaveholders during the early nineteenth century.

At the same time, the relationship between religion and antislavery was complex. For some upcountry Protestants, religious devotion alone appears to have guided their dissent. Birthright Quakers and Anabaptists, for instance, inherited the antislavery tendencies that were

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25 In his Proclamation, William W. Holden warned freedpeople that if “you are idle you will become vicious and worthless; if vicious and worthless you will have no friends, and will at last perish.” See Ibid.
26 Quoted from William Evans [Greenville, TN] to “Cousin Mollie [Cleveland County, NC], Sept. 6th 1861. Mary Ann Covington Wilson Papers, SHC.
central to their churches’ doctrines. Their commitment to living Christ’s two Great
Commandments urged Quakers, in particular, to embrace activism and challenge earthly
injustice. But for others, economic and social anxieties were apparent factors in the equation.
As Hinton Rowan Helper’s example shows, one could primarily oppose slavery on secular
grounds, but still use religion as a tool to sway the court of public opinion. Helper, the author of
*The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, and the self-described voice of the Southern
yeomanry, hated slavery because it threatened the economic advancement of common whites.
Yet he used examples from Scripture, evidence he deemed indisputable, to bolster his argument
for immediate abolition. Furthermore, Helper reminded Southern Protestants that the
denominational pioneers that they held sacred, individuals such as John Wesley, had opposed
slavery and would have expected their followers to honor their legacy. Of course, the designs of
the founders were not lost on folk Protestants. Perhaps most striking, starting in the 1840s
abolitionist Wesleyan Methodists began leaving the mainline denomination in an attempt to
honor their church’s foundational principles. As “poor” people, Wesleyans probably agreed with
much of Helper’s economic philosophy. More than likely, their own marginality helped usher
them toward the Wesleyan Methodist church. But there is no doubt that Wesleyans imagined
themselves on a Christian campaign to end slavery, a course which dually honored God and John
Wesley. Their Methodist faith grounded their principles and allowed them to blossom even as
sectional debates over slavery became increasingly heated and, at times, violent.

All in all, the evidence makes clear that religion was central to social and political dissent
in the Upper South during the antebellum and Civil War eras. Yet, it is important to reemphasize
that no single formula existed. Rather, when it came to dissent—whether that be opposition to
slavery or opposition to the Confederacy—religion acted in both leading and supporting roles.
On one hand, religion drove dissent. This was certainly the case with Quaker activists such as the Coffins who helped hone the Underground Railroad into a sophisticated antislavery network—and later anti-Confederate network—that stretched from the upcountry to the Midwest and beyond. On the other hand, however, dissent also fueled religion. Secular tensions helped initiate a course that caused Southern Protestantism to splinter as the nineteenth century progressed. Divisions within the Holston Conference of the Methodist Church embody this process, and display that separation could be both imagined and real. Even after begrudgingly aligning with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, some Holston Methodists, and entire congregations in fact, insisted that they were still true to the “old ship” in heart and mind.

Internal disputes over slavery may not have been enough to break the conference, officially that is, in the 1840s. But eventually, approximately twenty years later, wartime political divisions pushed Holston Methodists over the edge, causing them to form two separate church conferences, in effect, a Confederate conference and a Unionist conference.

Ultimately, the complexity of dissent in the upcountry suggests that religion and society in the nineteenth century South were close-knit. They had to be. The secular and religious were never isolated, but rather in constant conversation, a situation that, in portions of the Upper South at least, produced an atmosphere that was ripe for social, political, and religious dissent. The influx of Quakers and German Protestants, including Dunkards and Moravians, in the eighteenth century established a precedent for religious choice in the region that proliferated in time as class conscious folk Protestants claimed independence from their mainline churches. As neighbors and as participants in a larger community, the region’s diverse array of Protestants cooperated with one another, laboring together, celebrating and mourning together, and often worshipping together. Intimately connected, over the years, they shared socioreligious ideas that went against
the grain of mainstream Southern society. Importantly, this distinctive exchange helped facilitate a spirit of dissent in the upcountry that prevented the Southern Orthodoxy from establishing a secure foothold in the region, and, in turn, allowed marked opposition to slavery and the Confederacy to thrive. Uniquely situated at the junction of cooperation and dissent, the upcountry experience illuminates the paradox that religion served as both a unifying and polarizing force in nineteenth century America.

Afterword: White Protestants Moving Forward

“‘The scepter has departed,’”” cheered David Hodgin, an antislavery Unionist from Guilford County, North Carolina, “that miserable pro-slavery oligarchy. . . . is gone.” For Hodgin and many other Southerners, Reconstruction ushered in a new era of hope. As Southerners worked to rebuild “the waste places” surrounding them, Hodgin anticipated that the masses, with the help of the federal government, would resurrect the South, albeit into something new and vastly different than the prewar order. As part of the overhaul, he prayed that postwar changes would call Southerners to a spiritual rebirth as well. With slavery and secession no longer on the Southern Orthodoxy’s agenda, Hodgin believed that the window of opportunity was open for preachers of “the right sort” to encourage sinners to repent and embrace the “right principles.” Yet, Hodgin understood that challenges abounded. God may have derailed secession and willed the destruction of the “oligarchy,” but in early 1866 he observed that “the same old vile, persecuting, treasonable spirit is still, to some extent, in the land.”

27 It was of “vast importance,” Hodgin wrote to a friend, for ministers to counsel those in need before “the demoralization . . . and treason become[s] permanent.” Despite Hodgin’s guarded optimism, the

demise of slavery and secession did not close the gap among Southern Protestants in the years immediately following the Civil War. Rather, after 1865 Southern Protestants maintained their irony of being as close-knit and as bitterly divided as ever.

Protestants who had been at odds with the Old South’s secular and ecclesiastical establishments continued to find common religious ground in Reconstruction. The locally unique socioreligious exchange which had previously characterized interdenominationalism in the upcountry carried over into the postwar period, and helped shape the course of religious life moving forward. In 1866, Quaker minister Isham Cox reported hosting numerous “favoured Meeting[s]” in Methodist and Baptist churches around the North Carolina Piedmont. In April of the same year he traveled “through the mud and over the hills” to visit Quakers near New Market and Friendsville in East Tennessee. Along his route through the heart of the North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee hill country, Cox held “public meetings,” including “a satisfactory Meeting at Mt Carmel amongst the Methodist[s]” in Virginia and “quite a favoured Meeting at Mt Airy” at the foot of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina.

Isham Cox’s remarks were usually positive, but revealed little about those who attended his meetings. However, while visiting the upcountry in 1866, Joseph Morris, a Quaker Missionary from Ohio, noticed that “poor families” were particularly welcoming and receptive of his religious message. Morris later recalled that “I never saw people exhibit more gratitude to the Father of all our mercies than do these poor, neglected white people” of North Carolina’s

28 “A brief account of the life and travels of Isham Cox, Written by himself,” pp. 22-24, Isham Cox Papers, FHC.
29 The Friends that Cox went to visit lived in Jefferson and Blount Counties. They were probably members of Lost Creek Meeting located near New Market, Tennessee.
30 “A brief account of the life and travels of Isham Cox, Written by himself,” p. 22, Isham Cox Papers, FHC.
31 Morris concluded that he must “have the approval of Divine Justice in being with . . . this long neglected class . . . and not one word of insult offered by any person.” Morris implied that much of the local “destitute” that he “called upon” were war widows and their children. Joseph Morris, Reminiscences of Joseph Morris, being a Brief History of the Life and Labors of Charity of the Author, second ed. (Mt. Gilead, OH: Sentinel Printing House, 1899), 76-77.
northwestern Piedmont. Coincidentally, the specific area where Morris visited was a place where Quakers and others regularly interacted, and where the old time Methodist spirit persisted. Following the war, a coalition of local Friends and folk Methodists organized a “community Sunday school” in an arbor near the settlement of Shady Grove. “Various ministers” preached at the spot, and in 1871 a revival took place that encouraged those with “Wesleyan principles” to rebuild the Southern wing of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. With help from Quaker neighbors and sympathetic local preachers, they built Shady Grove Church, a simple log structure near “the old arbor” that one visiting Wesleyan described in 1872 as “the best rural Methodist meetinghouse in three counties.”

Yet still, deep-seated hostilities also persisted into Reconstruction, which prevented Southern Protestants from mending old wounds. Disputes which had arisen years earlier out of slavery and the war were simply too entrenched for Southerners to pack away. Once again, churches became a battleground where dissenters and the mainstream went head to head. In the summer of 1866, Charles W. Woolen informed a friend that “Secesh” in Randolph County were outraged with local Methodists who were adorning their churches with the United States flag. Hardly sympathetic to the wants of former Confederates, Woolen upheld that Methodist ministers should “preach under the Stars and Stripes” without interruption. Just to the west, lingering political tensions were also apparent in the Primitive Baptist churches which dotted the

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32 Ibid., 76-77.
33 The community of Shady Grove is approximately five miles east of Kernersville, Forsyth County, North Carolina.
34 Wesleyan congregations stretched from Piedmont North Carolina to Grayson County in southwestern Virginia in the 1840s and 1850s; however, anxieties made their very public abolitionist platform difficult to maintain. in the post-Nat Turner South. In the 1850s Southern authorities used intimidation to force Wesleyan missionaries such as Adam Crooks and Daniel Worth to return to the Midwest. Wesleyan churches began closing their doors soon after; however sympathetic upcountry Methodists maintained their “Wesleyan principles.” Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South, 112-113.
35 Quaker George Bowman, for instance, donated land. Local ministers such as Jesse Gray and Zadock Stafford “walked from nearby Bunker Hill” to preach. Shady Grove was the first Wesleyan Methodist congregation to be established in the South after the Civil War. Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South, 112-113, 117-119.
36 Dr. C. W. Woolen [probably Randolph County, N.C.] to “Mrs. Daniel Worth” [likely in Indiana], July 2, 1866, in Nicholson, Wesleyan Methodism in the South, 113.
Blue Ridge section of northwestern North Carolina and southwestern Virginia. After the war, for instance, elders in the Fisher River Primitive Baptist Association debated the standing of church members who had joined the Heroes of America. The subject caused a temporary rift within the association as some elders refused to “deal with members belonging to secret orders as transgressors.” Finally, by the end of 1871, the “matter of ‘Secret Orders’ had been adjusted satisfactorily” within the Fisher River Association.37

However, other folk Baptists in nearby Appalachian counties experienced a more permanent break. Starting in 1867 anti-Confederate Baptists around the border of Ashe County, North Carolina and Grayson County, Virginia left their congregations to form the Union Baptist Church, a grassroots denomination that made loyalty to the United States during the Civil War a basis of its foundation.38 Even though they established a brand of faith that was entirely independent, Union Baptists were Calvinists who were theologically similar to other Old Time Baptists.39 They could even be in full communion with Primitive congregations who shared their anti-Confederate leanings. The Mountain Union Baptist Association, for instance, was in correspondence with likeminded “sister associations” including the Primitive Baptist Association of Regular Baptists located in nearby Wilkes County, North Carolina. Over time, Mountain

38 The split supposedly followed a spirited plea that Elder Resin Jones made before his flock at Silas Creek Church (a member of Senter District Primitive Baptist Association) in Ashe County, North Carolina. According to a church historian, around 1867 Elder Jones proclaimed that “The time has come when the two parties can not live together in the church. I’ll see every rebel hung as high as Haaman’s gallows before I will fellowship them.” J. F. Fletcher, *A History of the Ashe County, North Carolina and New River, Virginia Baptist Associations* (Raleigh: Commercial Printing Co., 1935), 31.
39 Still, Union Baptists and Primitive Baptists were not identical. Unlike their Primitive Baptist neighbors, Union Baptists allowed church members to join “societies” such as the Masons and temperance groups. Biographer, J. F. Fletcher insisted that Union Baptists “were the first denomination in the mountains to insert foot-washing as a church ordinance in their Articles of Faith.” Fletcher, *A History of the Ashe County and New River Baptist Associations*, 33.

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Unionists accepted “the right hand of fellowship” from other Old Time Baptists congregations in the Blue Ridge section of northwestern North Carolina and southwestern Virginia. 40

At the same time, Reconstruction offered upcountry Methodists the opportunity to return to “the old ship.” Certainly some, such as George Ekin and Eli Hustill, had remained true to the “old” church in heart and mind after the Plan of Separation. But the Confederate defeat allowed dissenters to formally reaffiliate with the Methodist Episcopal Church, a long-awaited homecoming that some interpreted as a patriotic and Christian duty. Before the war even ended, the Federal occupation of East Tennessee enabled the Unionists of Holston to put the ball into motion. On July 7, 1864, anti-Confederate Methodist leaders from the Tennessee hills, including ringleader William G. Brownlow, met in Knoxville where they “determined . . . no longer to live under the iron rule of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” a conference which “in this wicked rebellion . . . took her stand upon the treasonable and therefore false foundation of secession.” 41 “Loyal” Holston Methodists continued to make Christian devotion to the United States a cornerstone of their philosophy as they moved forward in Reconstruction. 42 In their Annual Report for 1867, conference leaders reaffirmed that “as a church we have always stood by the Government in sunshine and storm, and our ministers have at all times . . . taught the

40 Quoted from Minutes of the Tenth Annual Session of the Mountain Union Baptist Association, Held With Mt. Pleasant Church, Grayson Co., VA., On the 23d day of September, 1876 (Independence, VA.: Printed at the Clipper Office, 1876), 1. The Mountain Union Baptist Association was the church’s first association formed in 1867. Upon formation church elders agreed to correspond with likeminded associations including the one previously mentioned, as well as Stoney Fork Association situated in nearby Watauga and Wilkes Counties. Several Union Baptist congregations can still be found in Appalachia, including the original Mountain Union Baptist Association. Richard Alan Humphrey, “Union Baptists” Encyclopedia of Religion in the South, eds. Samuel S. Hill, Charles H. Lippy, and Charles Reagan Wilson (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 81.


42 Following the Confederate surrender, Holston Methodists in western North Carolina and southwestern Virginia defected to the “old ship” as well. In 1867, a new regional conference called the Virginia and North Carolina Mission Conference organized in the upcountry under the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church.
people . . . patriotism and love of country.” Yet, the Unionist leadership of Holston also made clear that they welcomed the providential demise of slavery “with the liveliest satisfaction.”

Internal debates over slavery had plagued the conference in the 1840s and 1850s, but now, Holston dissenters who were safely back in the “old ship,” defined emancipation as “that great act of national right and justice,” and applauded “the Constitutional amendment, by which slavery is forever prohibited in the United States.”

After 1865, upcountry dissenters kept on viewing their lives and circumstances through a religious prism as they always had. Church divisions, disputes over the placement of the United States flag in houses of worship, and lingering discrepancies over whose religious principles were “right,” continued to both polarize and unify Southern Protestants. So too did partisan politics which maintained a deeply religious tone during Reconstruction. Upcountry scalawags such as William W. Holden proclaimed that the Republican Party was God’s party, providentially placed to redefine the South’s social and political orders and to keep former Secessionists at bay. Although ingrained hostilities were difficult for white Southerners of the Civil War generation to progress beyond, in time, most did. With national reconciliation came internal reconciliation. Perhaps time and general weariness were largely responsible, but it is likely that Christian forgiveness had something to do with it as well. Alexander H. Jones, an opponent of slavery and an outspoken Unionist during the war, had little sympathy for Confederates, but as early as December of 1865 he conceded that forgiveness was the

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appropriate course to pursue. Other Southerners may not have shared Jones’s munificence in 1865, but eventually they found it. As memory faded into forgetfulness and a new generation began to come of age, neighbors lost interest in settling old scores. Recalling the antislavery and anti-Confederate activism of his younger years, Addison Coffin, an upcountry Quaker émigré to the Midwest, wrote in the 1890s that:

“When I go back to the scenes of those eventful days, and look into the bright, kindly faces of the grandchildren of men who sixty years ago would have shot me down at sight if found on my secret mission, it fills me with emotions that cannot be expressed, and I thank God that my heart is full of love and kindness to those young lives, who are all unconscious of the events of the past. I walk about saying in my heart, thank God, thank God, thank God.”

Whether it was forgiveness, forgetfulness, or something in between, the fire of animosity that slavery and civil war had caused to burn among white Southern Protestants gradually died down. Out of the ashes arose a New South, full of promise, but deeply scarred from a conflicted past.

46 Jones, *Knocking at the Door*, 36-37.
47 Addison Coffin, *Life and Travels of Addison Coffin, Written by Himself* (Cleveland: William G. Hubbard, 1897), 42.
“The slaveocracy dies hard; the heads of the hydra will inflict wounds even after they have been severed from the body. Crush them as they are cut off.”

EPILOGUE:

“THY KINGDOM COME”

Southern anti-Confederates, black and white, found Divine meaning in the Union victory, a prophetic event which seemed to usher in a new Christian age filled with hope. For freedpeople, the fall of the Confederacy affirmed that Jubilo, their long-awaited deliverance from bondage, had arrived. The realization was nothing short of Biblical. Just as God had led the Israelites out of ancient Egypt, the demise of slavery in America, certainly accomplished through the direction of Providence, verified to blacks that they were among the modern-day elect. White dissenters drew similar conclusions regarding the outcome of the war and their own relationship with God. For them, the Confederate defeat made clear that the Lord had not forsaken his chosen nation and its citizenry of Christian patriots. In a similar fashion, then, emancipation and the restoration of the Union revealed to black and white anti-Confederates that they had, indeed, been on the side of the righteous. Likewise, both groups, although largely for their own reasons, imagined that the Almighty and an army of true Christians—both within and without the South—had removed the Devil and his earthly agents from their midst. However,

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1 North Carolina Standard, May 15, 1865.
2 In June 1865, a pro-Union rally in Surry County, North Carolina went as far as to declare that “the Union army [is] heretofore known as the true Conservatives.” Surry County Resolutions, June 6, 1865, William L. Scott Papers, RL.
both understood, too, that the struggle between good and evil was never fully decided. As William W. Holden warned in May 1865, “the slaveocracy dies hard; the heads of the hydra will inflict wounds even after they have been severed from the body. [We must] Crush them as they are cut off.”

With Satan ever-lurking, black and white upcountry residents united for the first time en masse to ward off a common enemy. Though their aspirations for the future were not identical, they shared similar hopes of building a new and acceptable order moving forward, all-in-all a New South that would please God and allow his faithful citizens to flourish. Therefore, forging ahead after April 1865 blacks and whites at times pulled together to structure an environment that would challenge the very basis of the Old South, as well as the Confederacy that had defended its unjust ideals. It was to be a comprehensive overhaul that affected secular and religious life.

After the war, for instance, the Holston Conference of the “Old” Methodist Episcopal Church organized a “mixed ministry” to tend to its flock of “loyal” Methodists, black and white, in western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southwestern Virginia. Disputes over slavery had once divided Holston Methodists, but throughout Reconstruction the conference’s interracial clergy coordinated efforts to save souls and convened regularly to

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“Conservative” was a badge of honor that anti-Confederate North Carolinians applied to themselves during the Civil War and early Reconstruction.

3 North Carolina Standard, May 15, 1865.

4 While I primarily emphasize political cooperation in this epilogue, I intend to illuminate cooperation in religious spaces in my later work. Historians have convincingly shown how black and white Protestants went their own ways in the South after 1865. For the most part this is true; however, there was a moment in time when some upcountry blacks and whites experimented with maintaining or building an integrated church. Of course this was not the standard. It is safe to assume that most upcountry freedpeople quickly embraced the opportunity to establish separate churches during Reconstruction. In fact, the act of walking away from white churches was a key component of the social overhaul that was then underway. Yet, in the upcountry, even separation involved important moments of interracial cooperation, and potential integrated worship. For instance, during Reconstruction local Quakers—and others as well—worked intimately with freedpeople in the processes of church and community-building. These were often church-based initiatives grounded in their Christian commitment to “love thy neighbor.” However, upcountry Quakers and likeminded associates also exercised their religious principles via secular avenues such as participation in the Republican Party, the Union League of America, and the Freedmen’s Bureau.
discuss church matters. The magnitude of change and ongoing potential, however, was particularly evident in portions of the North Carolina upcountry where freedpeople organized with white Quakers, Moravians, and folk Protestants in support of the Republican Party, a concerted effort that was as holy as it was political.

Rebuilding lives in the wake of war and slavery would take time; however, black and white upcountry residents embraced the challenge of overthrowing the slaveocracy almost immediately. Within two years of the close of the war, this meant, for many, throwing their weight behind the Republican Party and its supporting organizations such as the Union League of America. The North Carolina Republican Party officially formed in March 1867. That same month at a convention which marked its commencement, black and white anti-Confederates assembled in the yard of the state capitol under a banner proclaiming, “Union, Liberty, Equality.” Leading the ceremony, William W. Holden announced to all that the old order was no more. “The former master,” he proclaimed, now “met his former slave as his equal in all that pertains to…the rights of self-government.” No doubt Holden and probably most whites in attendance were not prepared to consider freedpeople as their social equals. Nevertheless, the interracial gathering that day in Raleigh announced a social and political changing of the guard that most would have had a hard time imagining a decade prior. The realization of common

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5 According to a church historian, “the work in the Conference was carried on among both the whites and Negroes and this continued until 1879. In 1876 two-thirds of the preachers were Negroes and the same was true in general of the membership.” Elmer T. Clark, *Methodism in Western North Carolina* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1966), 78-79. Also see postwar church minutes including, *Minutes of the Holston Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1866* (Knoxville: Brownlow & Haws, 1866); and *Minutes of the Holston Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1867. Held at Knoxville, Tenn., October 3, 1867* (Knoxville: Brownlow & Haws, 1867). Of course not all churches would experiment with a “mixed ministry.” Still, major transformations were underway. As David Hodglin, a white Methodist from the North Carolina Piedmont, recognized in 1866, “Society is undergoing a great change. The old pro-slavery priests . . . are like the men in Shakespeare, ‘Their occupation’s gone.’ They can’t get an audience among the truly loyal.” David Hodglin [Greensboro, N.C.] to “Mrs. Daniel Worth” [likely in Indiana], February 15, 1866, in Roy S. Nicholson, *Wesleyan Methodism in the South: Being the Story of Eighty-Six Years of Reform and Religious Activities in the South as Conducted by the American Wesleyans* (Syracuse, N.Y.: The Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1933), 112.
goals—not to mention Holden’s rhetoric of political equality—was unprecedented in the nineteenth century South and was a necessary stepping stone towards future progress.

Honing in a bit more closely, scattered records left by grassroots Republican organizations, particularly the Union League of America, suggest important ways in which freedpeople and “scalawags” cooperated and defined themselves on the local and regional levels in the late 1860s. The Union League of America, initially a northern-based pro-Union brotherhood, extended into parts of the South during Reconstruction with the primary purpose of supporting the Republican Party. Holden and James Henry Harris, a college educated former slave from the North Carolina Piedmont, introduced the Union League to North Carolina in 1867. After forming the North Carolina Union League Grand Council, Holden and Harris—who served as president and vice-president respectively of the state Grand Council—encouraged their political allies to organize Union League chapters on the community level. Probably most Union League chapters in North Carolina were segregated, as they appear to have been in other Southern states. In portions of the upcountry, however, freedmen and white Unionists often joined common organizations where they worked together to promote the club’s political agenda. Such was the case with the Deep River chapter of the Union League, which was organized largely by Piedmont Quakers, as well as the Hamburg Lodge chapter located in the nearby foothills.

Integrated nearly from the start, the Hamburg Lodge chapter of the Union League of America quickly grew into a cohesive unit which relied on the cooperation and active support of

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6 In North Carolina, evidence suggests that Union League councils—made up wholly or mostly of blacks—were most numerous in the eastern plantation district where the population of freedmen was proportionately higher than other sections of the state. Mark L. Bradley, *Bluecoats & Tar Heels: Soldiers and Civilians in Reconstruction North Carolina* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 150.
7 Deep River Lodge, Union League of America, Minute Book, 1868 Joel Romulus Welborn Papers, RL.
“the Unionists of both races.”

On April 13, 1867, local mill owner, Jacob Brower, and his son, John Morehead Brower, organized the council on the outskirts of Mount Airy. A rural community at the base of the Blue Ridge in Surry County, it was a place where folk Protestantism and Quakerism had warded off the Southern Evangelical establishment years earlier. At the first meeting, the Browers and seven additional officers, all local men, “organized in due form & initiated” seventeen other white men, mostly yeomen, as members. Twenty-eight additional white men applied for membership at the following meeting on April 27. At the third meeting, however, three black men applied for admission and were accepted. The club agreed to meet each Saturday at Brower’s Hamburg Mill, and the council’s ranks steadily increased each week. By the early fall of 1867, Hamburg Lodge counted over three hundred members, one-third of which were black. Within a few months, two black men were acting as council officers, while others served on special committees. Importantly, the black and white men who formed Hamburg Lodge bound themselves together across racial lines out of common purpose. That they chose to meet weekly in private is significant. But their willingness to publically advertise their interracial membership, numerical strength, and shared political principles is particularly remarkable. To celebrate July 4, 1867, for instance, the lodge resolved to “move in procession to Mount Airy” where several members would “read the Declaration of Independence and make an oration.”

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8 Hamburg Lodge, Union League of America, Minute Book, Brower Family Papers, SHC; Steven A. Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 188-89.

9 Hamburg Lodge Minute Book, Brower Family Papers, SHC; Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 188-89.

10 Hamburg Lodge Minute Book, June 22, 1867, Brower Family Papers, SHC. Black and white Surry Unionists, however, did not work alone. Throughout the upcountry, Republican men joined local Union League chapters and similar pro-Republican clubs. As Hamburg Lodge’s numbers continued to swell, members “unanimously carried” that a few breakaway to form the “Bethel Council” of the Union League. Similarly, the Heroes of America continued to operate in the upcountry after the war with the purpose of keeping ex-Confederates out of office. During the fall of 1867, local Union Leaguers and “Heroes” worked together to push their similar agendas. Also in
Figure 15: Charter Establishing the North Carolina Union League Grand Council. Granted by the National Grand Council of the Union League of America in Washington, D.C. to William Woods Holden, James Henry Harris, and seven other state Republican leaders in Raleigh, March 26, 1867. Photograph of original certificate in James Henry Harris Papers, NCDAH.

At the same time, religious and community networks continued to aid social and political dissent in the wake of the Civil War, albeit in a more inclusive manner than they previously had. In August 1867, Wachovia Moravians invited James H. Harris, the black spokesman for the Republican Party in North Carolina, to speak before an integrated crowd in Salem. At the meeting Harris “urged his friends to be active and endeavor to organize at once,” a request that Wachovia residents and their associates honored. Not surprisingly, the leaders of Hamburg Lodge were in correspondence with Wachovia Republicans. The council appointed black

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1867, upcountry council members and other Unionists regularly strategized together to select “the strongest and best” Republican leaders to represent them in the county and state conventions. Ibid.
member, Lewis Banner, to represent the lodge at the meeting in which Harris spoke. Moreover, Banner was to “meet J. H. Harris and request him to come to Mt. Airy and address the people of the county upon the issues before the country.” As an incentive, Hamburg Lodge offered to fund Harris’s trip “to this place and back to Salem.” Whether Harris traveled with Banner back to Mount Airy is unknown. Harris’s public address in Salem and the lodge’s request, however, are significant. Harris was not only a native North Carolinian and vice-president of the state’s Union League Grand Council; he was also an ex-slave, a Union army veteran, and a leading advocate of equal citizenship and education. Directly after the war, Harris served as president of North Carolina’s Equal Rights League, and additionally organized and chaired the Freedmen’s Convention which met in Raleigh in 1866. The willingness of Reconstruction-era upcountry whites to openly align with, seek advice from, and float the travel bill for an African American Republican defies popular notions of postwar Southern society.

Perhaps more significant, it demonstrates a mutual eagerness to challenge not only a political machine, but also longstanding social mores. Again, while this is not to suggest that upcountry blacks and whites hoped together for complete social equality in 1867, it is to argue that upcountry blacks and whites consciously viewed their public cooperation as part of a mutual assault on an outdated order. In the process, they, at least temporarily, overturned a deep-rooted

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11 In 1870 Lewis and Emily Banner (ages 37 and 34 respectively) and their two children lived in Mount Airy. Lewis worked as a blacksmith while Emily was “Keeping House.” Beyond the nuclear family, four others contributed to the Banner household: Lewis Miller (age 21), Ella Morse (age 14), James Penn (age 30), and Eliza Penn (age 25). Ninth Census of the U.S., 1870: Surry County, N.C., Population Schedule.

12 Hamburg Lodge Minute Book, June 22, 1867, Brower Family Papers, SHC.

13 Ibid.

social structure that prohibited blacks and whites from organizing and denied blacks a political voice.

The cooperative efforts of black and white Republicans in the upcountry may have been geared toward the political, but they were inherently religious. Emancipation and the collapse of the Confederacy made clear to freedpeople and scalawags respectively that they were the righteous citizens of God’s blessed nation. They may not have had identical outlooks, but they shared related aspirations that served to draw them together. In large part, both imagined that the overall success of the dawning holy age rested upon their shoulders. Establishing a Christian kingdom on earth—an order that disfranchised the slaveocracy and rebuilt the power structure from the ground up—was imperative to their mission. Significantly, each drew from alternative religious frameworks that were comparable in that they stood independent from, and largely in contrast to, the Southern Orthodoxy and its conservative mainline agenda. In concert with related secular concerns, their religious frameworks proved similar enough to encourage upcountry freedpeople and scalawags alike to work together during Reconstruction with the express purposes of keeping the Devil at bay and attaining the ongoing blessings of the Almighty. Ultimately, their efforts fell short as Reconstruction dwindled and Jim Crow gradually emerged. Yet, important steps were made. In impressive shows of interracial cooperation that were rarely mirrored in the South until the Civil Rights era nearly one hundred years later, upcountry whites and blacks worked together to “crush . . . the heads of the hydra” and rebuild the South according to their own designs.
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